The History of KONAMI Arcade Classics

Edited by ファミ通

KONAMI Arcade Games
80s History

KONAMI was founded in 1969 as a jukebox rental and repair business and then went on to enter the game industry, which it still operates in today. Here is an arcade game chronology looking back at some of the iconic titles released in the 1980s. This was an era that saw the arrival an exceptionally large number of classics, even when considering a long history in the industry.

KONAMI Before Video Games

Prior to getting into the video game business, KONAMI manufactured a form of amusement cabinets called "electro-mechanical games" such as *Piccadilly Circus* (1976). These creations could be what prompted KONAMI to become involved in video game production.

■KONAMI Arcade Games - Release Chronology (1981-1989)

1981
- **Scramble** 1
  Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection title
- Frogger
- Super Cobra

1982
- Tutankham
- Pooyan
- Time Pilot

1983
- Roc'n Rope
- Gyruss
- Track & Field

1 Scramble - The trailblazer of KONAMI shoot 'em ups

The game that could be considered to be the starting point of the *Gradius* series. Noteworthy for its novel systems, such as being able to move forwards and downwards, along with a limited fuel supply.

1984

- Circus Charlie
- Time Pilot '84
- Hyper Sports
- Super Basketball
- Mikie
- Road Fighter

1985

- Yie Ar Kung-fu
- **TwinBee** (Japan exclusive) 2
  Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection title
- Kicker (Europe: Shao-lin's Road)
- **Nemesis** 3
  Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection title
- Konami's Ping Pong
- Rush'n Attack (Europe: Green Beret)

1986

- Mr. Goemon (Japan exclusive)
- **Life Force** 4
  Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection title
- Top Gunner (Europe: Jackal)
- WEC Le Mans 24
- Rock'n Rage

2 TwinBee - A colorful, pop-style shooter

Thanks to its unique docking mechanic, the game offered new possibilities in 2-player co-op. The pop graphics also proved popular with the female audience.

3 Nemesis - Classic among the classics

Nemesis is the smash hit first installment in the *Gradius* series. It would prove to be a major influence on many games that followed. It was full of innovative ideas that captivated players, such as an original power-up system, and the famous "Options".

4 Life Force - The spiritual successor to *Nemesis*

With gameplay different from its predecessor and vertical scrolling stages added to the mix, it represented a true evolution in the shoot 'em up genre.

1987

- Contra (Europe: Gryzor)
- MX5000 (Europe: Flak Attack)
- **Typhoon 5**
  Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection title

1988

- Super Contra
- **Haunted Castle 6**
  Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection title
- **Vulcan Venture 7**
  Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection title
- **Thunder Cross 8**
  Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection title

1989

- Bottom of the Ninth
- Crime Fighters
- Block Hole
- Gradius III

5 Typhoon - Using the latest hardware to its full potential

Typhoon was made using the newest technology at the time in terms of sprite stretching and rotation. In particular, the intense 3D stages were a big hit with fans.

6 Haunted Castle - Console hit comes to the arcades.

The arcade version of *Castlevania* bewitched fans of the series with its gorgeous graphics and audio. Its difficulty also proved to be the bane of many players.

7 Vulcan Venture - The long-awaited sequel

Vulcan Venture featured improvements across the board in music and, stages that scrolled vertically. It is still spoken of as a monumental achievement in the shoot 'em up genre due its painstaking level of perfection.

8 Thunder Cross - A masterpiece with unique gameplay

Thunder Cross differed from *Nemesis* by giving players control of the Options. (The version included in this collection is the North American version, which differs greatly from the Japanese version.) This innovative gameplay successfully set it apart from other series.

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Chapter 1

Game Showcase & Design Documents

Scramble

Released 1981

Venture into the unknown!

Scramble was the much-awaited video game KONAMI produced after making business purpose "electro-mechanical games" like *Piccadilly Circus* and *Kunitori Gassen*. Players take control of a space fighter to destroy enemy bases in this side-scrolling shoot 'em up game. The space fighter can fire shots straight ahead, or launch missiles down towards the ground. The game also implements a fueling mechanic, with the game ending once the player runs out of fuel. So, the player must destroy fuel tanks found throughout the stages to refuel in order to keep progressing. The combination of simple gameplay and tough level design offers players an exciting challenge. *Scramble* proved to be monumental in paving the way to later shoot 'em ups like *Nemesis*. This is a must play title for anyone who claims to be a gaming fan!

01 Game Showcase & Design Documents

TwinBee

Released 1985 (Japan exclusive)

Take back peace of an island!

TwinBee is a vertical-scrolling shooter that won over audiences with its pastel color palette and pop graphics. The story depicts the battle of pilots Annamon and Donnamon as they board the "TwinBee" and "WinBee," fighter aircraft developed by Dr. Cinnamon, to reclaim the Donburi Islands from the rule of King Spice. The main feature of the game is the upgrade system using bells. Players shoot clouds to reveal the bells hidden within, and then shoot said bells repeatedly to transform them into various power-ups like speed up items, clones, and shields. The attention to detail, such as putting changes into the music when players collect an upgrade, helped build KONAMI's reputation in terms of sound design. Simultaneous two-player co-op was also revolutionary for the time. Another defining characteristic of the game was the ability for two players to dock their ships together to unleash even more powerful attacks.

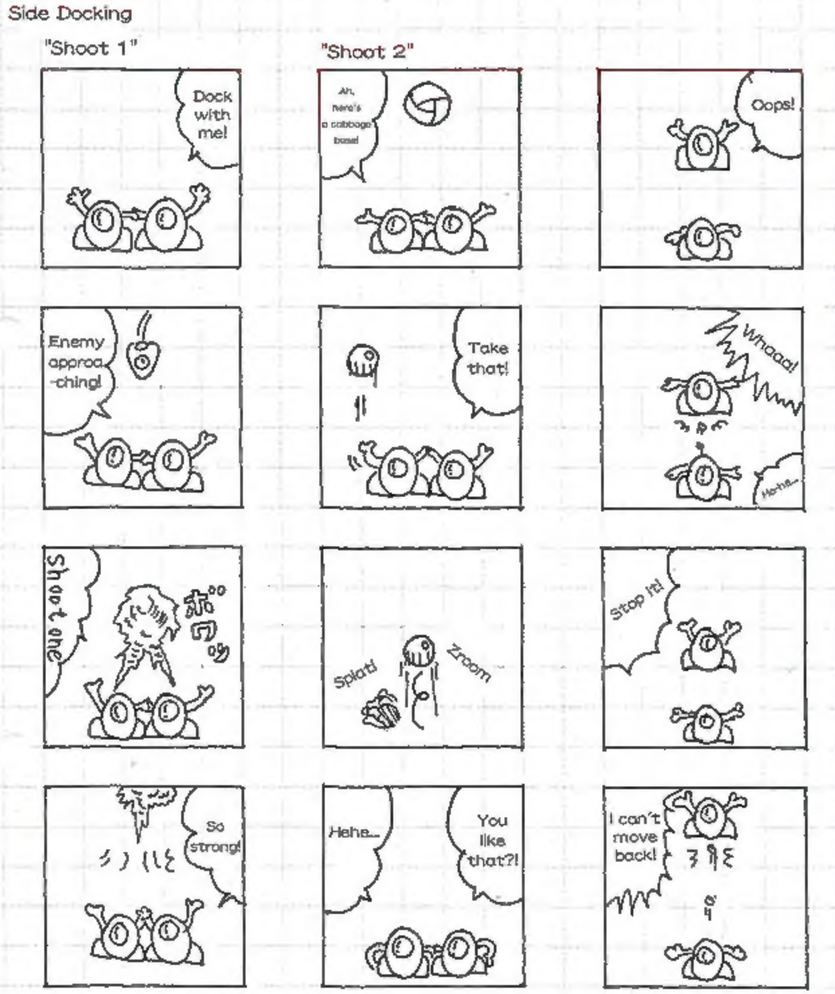
01 Game Showcase & Design Documents

TwinBee Design Documents

● TwinBee explanation comic 1 2

1

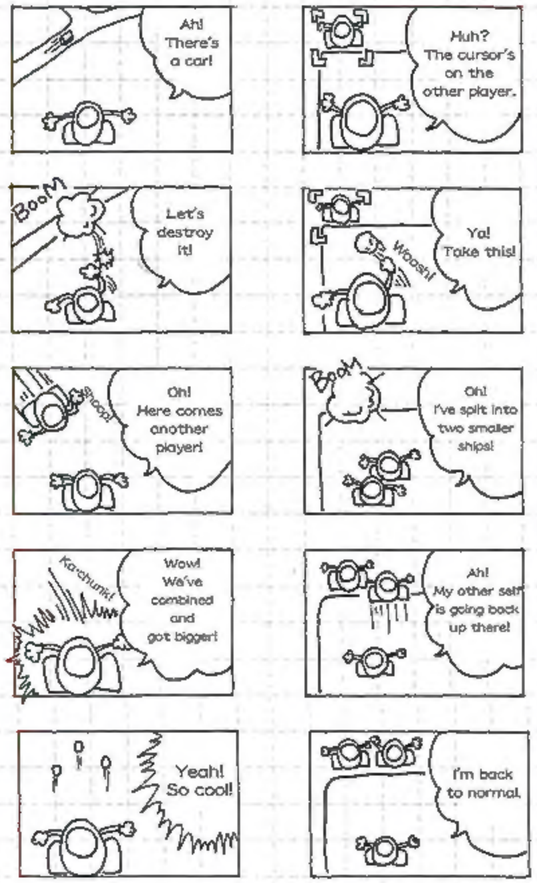
2



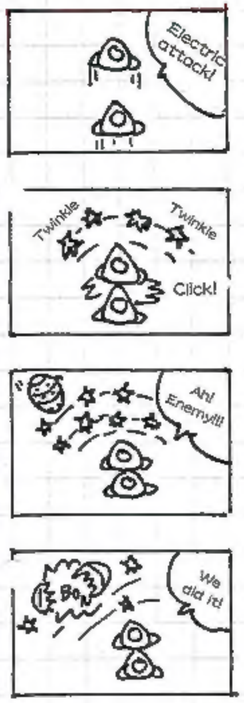
Comic strips detailing the systems of *TwinBee*. These depict the familiar power-up and docking gameplay mechanics, as well as things from the development stage that didn't make it into the game.

● TwinBee explanation comic 3 4 5

3


Ah! There's a car!
Huh? The cursor's on the other player.
Boom
Let's destroy it!
Woosh!
Ya! Take this!
Oh! Here comes another player!
Oh! I've split into two smaller ships!
Karchunk!
Wow! We've combined and got bigger!
Ah! My other self is going back up there!
Yeah! So cool!
I'm back to normal.

4



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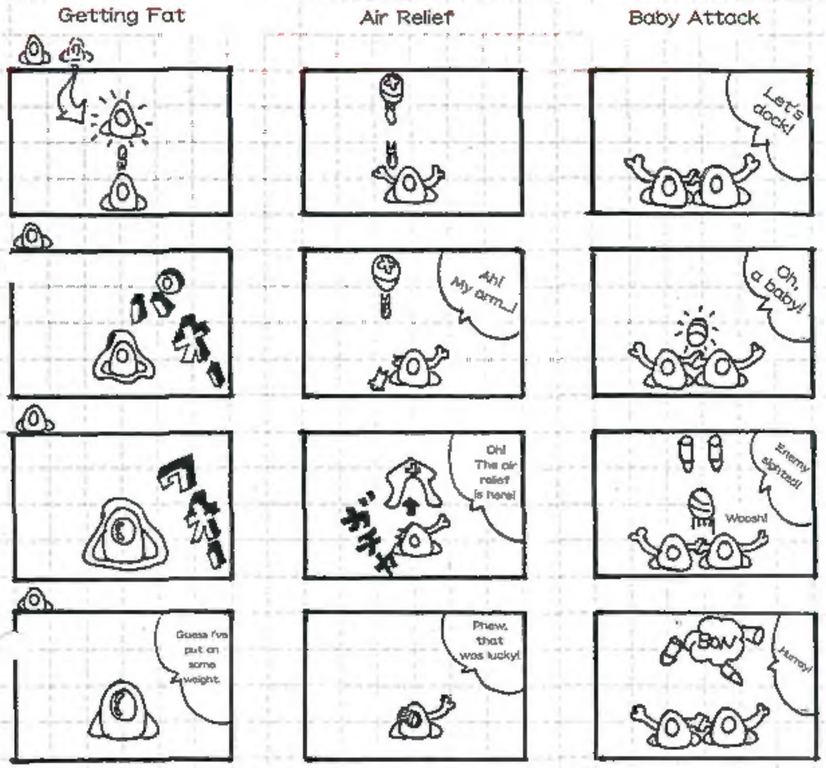
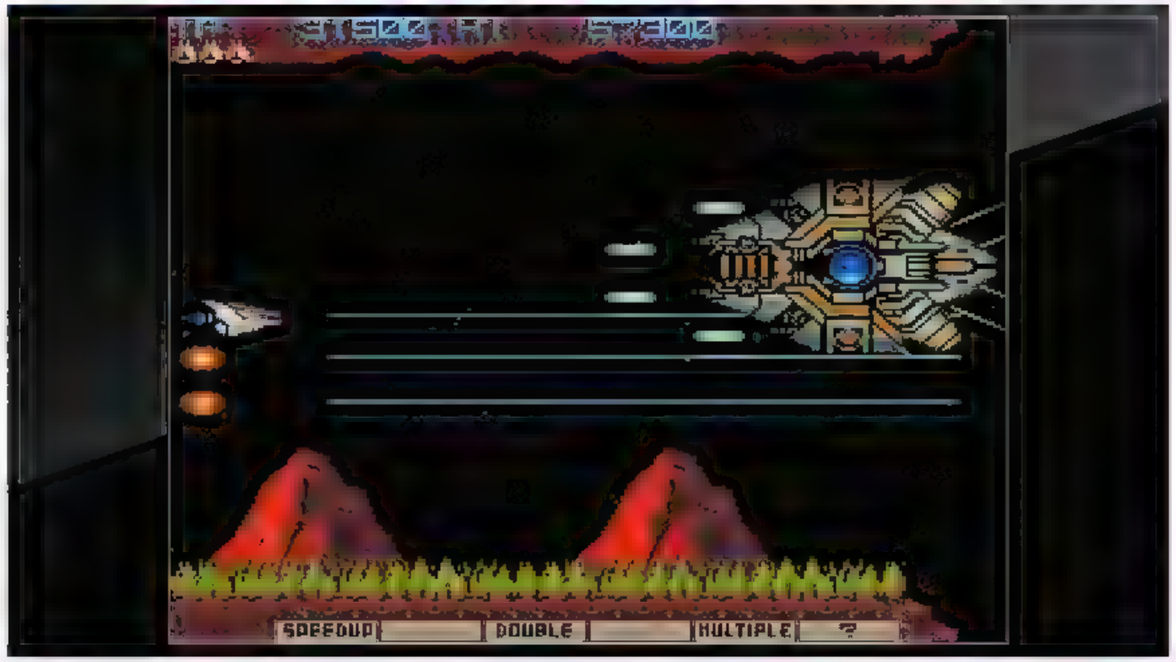


NEMESIS

Released 1985

It's a duel to the death with the evil Bacterions!

Nemesis is the immortal shoot 'em up that captivated so many gamers and boasts a solid fan base even today. The story follows the hyper-space fighter Vic Viper as it sets off to attack the fortress of the enemy Xaerous in order to save the planet Gradius. The planet has been driven to the brink of destruction by the onslaught of the subspace star cluster called Bacterion. *Nemesis* has a distinctive power-up system in which players collect "power capsules" that appeared when certain enemies are destroyed. These can then be used for speed up, missiles, double, laser, multiple, and barrier upgrades. Weapons called "Multiple" are not only invincible, but also fire off the same attack as the player. Up to a maximum of four can be kept at once. The game is made up of seven stages: Volcano, Stonehenge, Moai, Reverse Volcano, Tentacle, Cell, and Base. As players progress through the game they encounter distinct stages, each with a colossal boss waiting for them at the end. The fate of the planet Gradius lies in your hands!



Nemesis Design Documents

● Concept sheets 1 2

These are original design sheets. These not only contain rough ideas for the story of the final version, but also give an idea of how things were in the as-of-yet early stages of production.

1

Concept sheets

1 Game Type
Space game

2 Game Content
Scramble type shooter

3 Story
Evildoers trying to colonize our home planet have begun an all-out assault.
The protagonist has crossed the vast reaches of space to attack the enemy's homeworld...

4 Game Concept
① Anyone can play
② Immediate immersion
③ Never gets boring
④ Two ways to play

5 Marketing points
① Focused around the sense of adventure
ア Different patterns are popular
a Quick-paced, conditioned-reflex timing patt
b Tense timing pattern
c Exhilarating shooting pattern when player is in super strong mode
イ Endless gameplay
a Never-ending fun
ウ Establishing the story
a Profound

2

エ Use of weapons seen in science fiction movies
a Visual Effects
b Lots of fun
オ Player and weapon changes
a Suspenseful spy-hunter feeling

6 Target demographic
① The game is designed to be played for a long time by first-time players, experienced gamers, and gamers who love timing based games, fast paced games, shooting games and adventure games on things like laserdisc.

1

Publicity draft

Tag lines
"A new battle is about to devastate..."

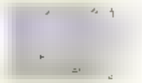
Game characteristics
Players can choose from up to six types of power ups based on the number of energy capsules picked up.

Game story summary
At the time, the planet "Gradius"
("Nemesis" outside of Japan)
had energy capsules stolen by many space colonies and was controlled by a ruthless star cluster of destruction, the Bacterions.
Players take control of the planet Gradius last hope in the form of a high-end fighter ship known as the Viper and storm the space colonies to recover the lost energy capsules.
① Take back the energy capsules hidden inside the leader enemy fighters and destroy the enemy base "Keerous" controlling each colony!

Comments (Why make this game?)
Among the many different kinds of games, like shooting games, character games, sports games, etc., shooting games are of course the ones that most easily excite just about everyone with their sense of destruction and joy. The entire team agreed on this and took it from there.
At first, the plan was to create a shooting game that would appeal to girls as well, but as the project took shape the team decided to turn it into an adventure game.
In the end, different options were explored and as the game was actually being created, it became less and less of an adventure game and turned into the game we have now which focuses on player power ups.
The creators themselves also believe that the six types of power ups are the game's biggest selling point.

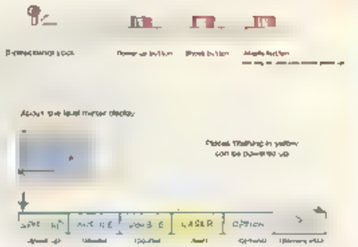
2

Tips and Tricks
Speed up should be powered up automatically
It can be powered up to 5 different levels
but too much speed can lead to self-destruction!
Missiles are an effective weapon against enemies on the ground
use the Missile Button!
When directing the Laser at many enemies,
they can be killed simultaneously.
Ripple Cannot be used with Double
With several Options, approaching enemies can be destroyed swiftly.
Up to four can be equipped at a time!
Double is best to blast enemies on the ceiling.
Think carefully about which Power Up will be most effective for each stage.
Blue Energy Capsules can destroy all enemies on screen.
Good for setting a new high score.

3 Other cool stuff
When the volcano in Stage 1 erupts and rocks come shooting out of it,
there are several four-dimensional doors where they won't hit the player at all.

It's necessary to be at the top of the four-dimensional doors.

Anecdotes
The most difficult thing was that if an item would change and something the team had been working on for half a year would be thrown out in one day. In addition, at too often the team would only have a single week to implement changes.
For some reason computers would crash on weekends or the day before a backup. In one case erasing a finally finished program...
Hunter had it that about three new games could be created from rejected characters and ideas.

3

How to play (Controls)


Energy capsules
Energy capsules only appear after destroying red-colored enemies or enemy formations.
The power up that is displayed on the level meter changes depending on the number of the energy capsules that have been picked up.
Different power ups can be used at the same time.
However Double and Laser cannot be used together.
Only up to four Options can be picked up
Speed up has 5 different levels.

● Publicity documents 1 2 3

Materials that were likely prepared for PR. They contain basic information on the game, along with commentary that arose during production.

Enemy Ideas 1 1 2 3 4 5 6

Design materials related to enemies. Many of the enemies have an organic design, partly due to designer Kengo Nakamura's skill at drawing living things.

1

Enemy characteristics

Cannon
Fixed to the ground or ceiling.
The direction of the barrel or cannon changes to target the player.
Basic enemy fixed to one spot.

Range of fire

Laser Cannon
A cannon that shoots a laser.
Laser hit detection is linear.

Within range of fire

2

Multi-Cannon
Three cannons form a single group.
With each cannon moving separately to target the player.
By shooting the base, all three cannons can be destroyed,
but when the only the ones on top have been taken out the ones
on the bottom will continue to attack the player.

Tank
Fires at the player while moving back and forth across the ground.

Basic enemy that moves on the ground.

Aims while moving back and forth.
When it detects the player, it stops and fires a projectile.

3

Spider Tank
Fires at the player while crawling across the ceiling.
The angle and direction of its barrel change.
Basic enemy that crawls along the ceiling.

Cockroach
Swiftly crawls along the ground and attacks the player
after hiding in the shadows.

4

Ant
Crawls on the ceiling and drops down when the player is underneath,
holding on and exploding after a few seconds.

The player can shake off this enemy by aggressively moving the joystick.

Long-Legged Robot (Three Types)
Attacks the player while moving on the ground faster than a tank.
Jumps sometimes.
Has regular projectiles, missiles, and lasers.

5

Mole Tank
Fires a projectile after popping out from the floor or ceiling then
burrows back in again.
Has a tough shell which can't be destroyed with fewer than three hits.
When the shell has been destroyed, the enemy can be eliminated
by hitting it with a projectile.

Spotlight
Emits light and tilts while spinning.
The light absorbs player projectiles.
Also, when the player enters into it,
he or she is pulled inside and comes in contact with the enemy's body,
resulting in death.
Can only be destroyed by firing player projectiles at the enemy's body.

6

Space Cutter
Scatters in 4, 8 or 16 directions to cut the player.

Cannot be destroyed by player projectiles.
Appears from outside the screen before the player.

Homing Missile
Appears from outside the screen before the player
is a missile that chases the player's movements.

Enemy ideas 2 7 8 9

7

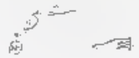
13. Artificial Satellite
Spins and rotates, targeting the player and firing lasers.

When its wings are in a perpendicular position,
they deflect projectiles, so the player has to aim at its center.

14. Rotating Cannon
Fires projectiles from three gun ports while rotating.

8

17. Option Hunter
Senses player projectiles and approaches and attacks the player
while dodging those projectiles.



18. Shifting Star
Indestructible enemy.
A star that changes in size and sucks in anything that touches it.
Kills not just the player, but also other enemies.
Moves slowly.

9

Flying Squirrel
Can only fly short distances and attacks the player while clinging
to the floor or ceiling.

16. Reaction
Senses player projectiles and approaches and attacks the player
while dodging those projectiles.

Stage concept art

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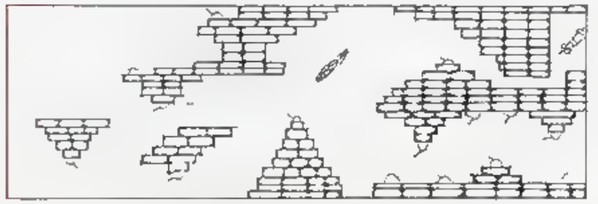


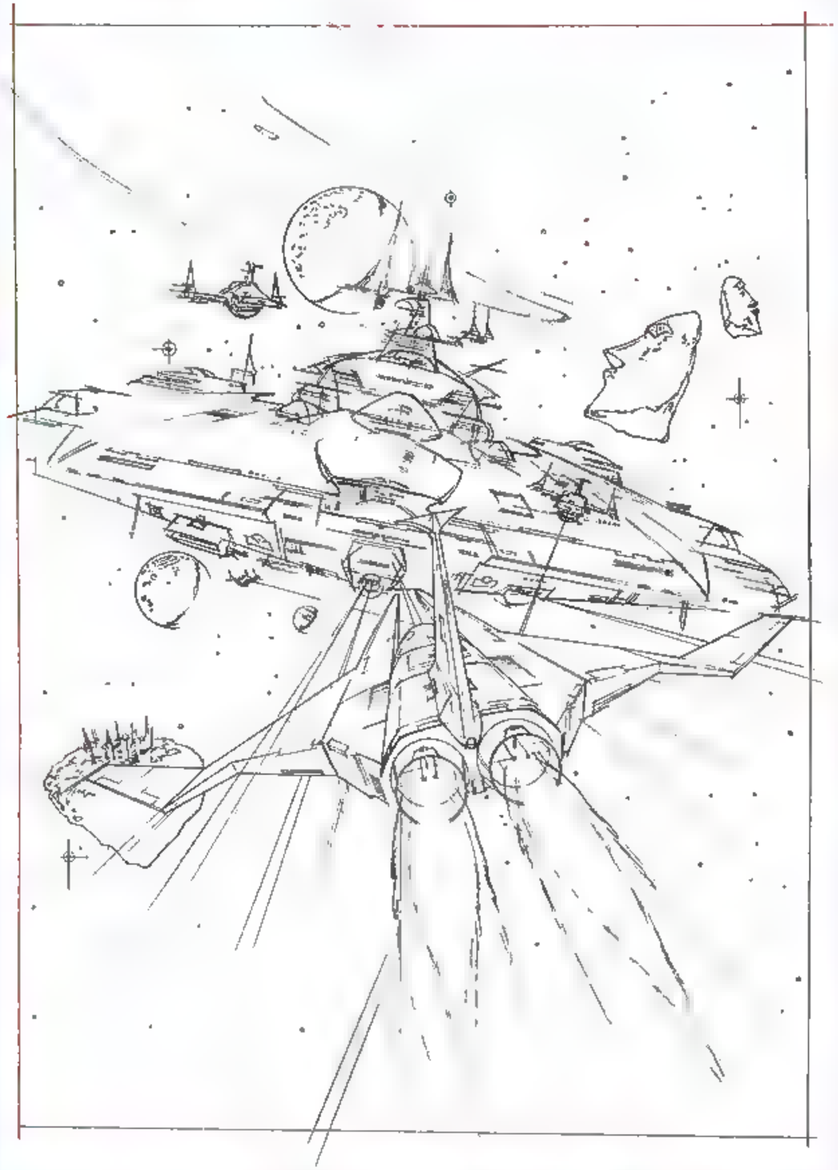
Tag line ideas

Gx-456 tag line concepts

- You have already experienced this strange world...
(You'll be the one to experience this strange world!)
↳ If the meaning is supposed to be "hero," the name should be changed to Hiro
- Hiro sees hell and comes back to life
(Hiro comes back from hell)
- Exciting adventure in a different dimension!
(An adventure in a different dimension that will excite you!)
- Hiro rises again from the burning flames.
- A space odyssey begins.

Notes with ideas for potential tag lines. While in the end none of these were actually used, they were all ideas meant to inspire excitement in players.

● Poster art - roughed draft



● Poster art

The acclaimed poster art for *Nemesis*, with the rough sketch on the left, and the finished illustration on the right. Note that the green warship standing in Vic Viper's way is based on the stage boss "Big Core."

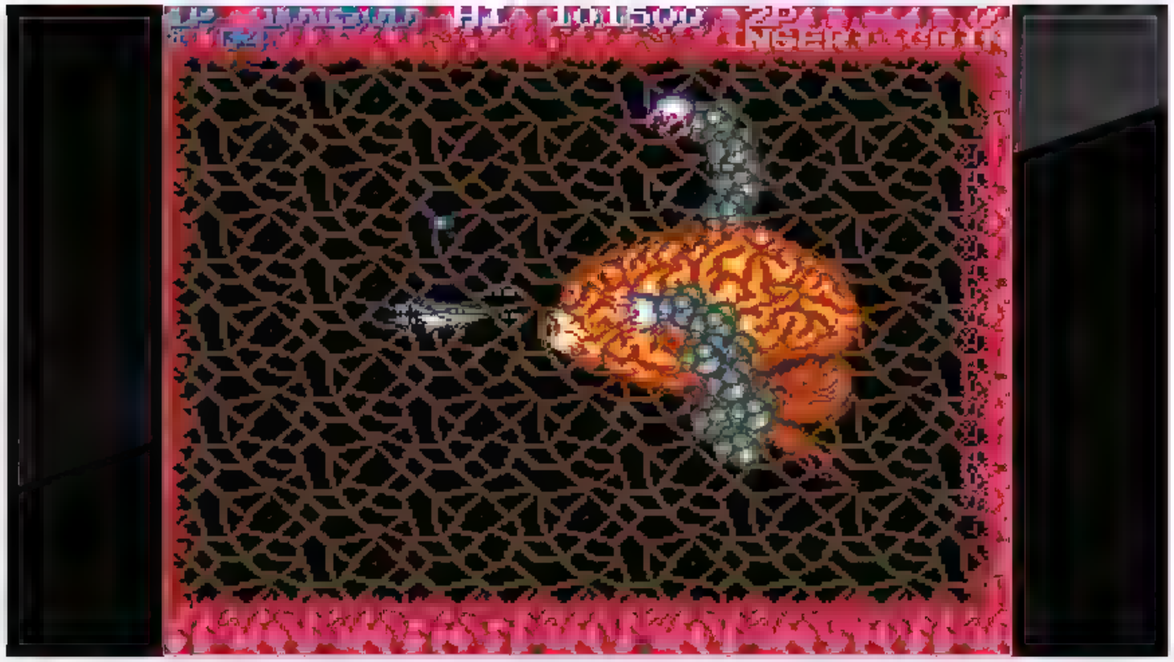
Game Showcase & Design Documents

LIFE FORCE

Released 1986

Calling all Viper pilots - the galaxy's on the edge of doom again!

Life Force was made as a spin-off of *Nemesis*. The Bacterion cluster's Salamander Arm have attacked the aquatic planet Latis as part of their ongoing invasion. Incapable of dealing with the situation alone, the space-time fighter Lord British, piloted by the prince of Planet Latis, seeks the aid of the planet Gradius. Receiving the distress call, hyper-space fighter Vic Viper sets forth from Gradius once more to join the battle. Though made as a follow-up, *Life Force* features many changes such as a switch to using items in the power-up system. Additionally, the screen scrolls in different directions depending on the stage; odd number stages scroll horizontally, and even number stages scroll vertically. *Life Force* also allows for two-player simultaneous action, with the first player controlling Vic Viper and the second piloting Lord British. A year later in 1987, *Life Force* was re-released in Japan with the power-up system and some of the graphics altered based on the international version.



Life Force Design Documents

● Stage stories 1 2

1

No 1/2

GX587 individual stage story outline

所属

氏名

First stage (Intestines stage)

In order to take down the living weapon "Zelos Force" two brave individuals will have to navigate its huge skeletal frame, break through a magic self-healing wall and destroy the giant brain in the center!

(It has one big eye and thrashes its tentacles)

Second stage (asteroid stage)

The Salamander army has lost the center point of its attack, the Zelos Force, and now uses asteroids as a shield to ambush the two heroes and position the heavy missile carrier Tetran.

(Has four feelers that launch energy projectiles. Its core is located behind a three-layered shield.)

Third stage (hellfire stage)

The two heroes head towards Burning Chaos in order to get closer to the enemy home world. This scorched world is home to fire birds who spew flames. The lord of flames "Dragon" awaits their arrival.

Spits fire thousands of times hotter than the sun.)

Fourth stage (land stage)

After the two heroes have passed through the Burning Chaos, they suddenly find a broad floating landmass before them. This landmass has already become a base for the Salamander army. Tens of millions of mobile weapons attack them there. The source of these machines are the three cores seen beyond.

(Hidden within the earth, they only surface in order to destroy the detected intruders.)

※ Explanations in brackets relate to the bosses.

1/2

2

No 2 2/2

GX-587 individual stage story outline

所属

氏名

Fifth stage (meteor stage)

After making it through the perilous landmass, a shower of concentrated macromolecule energy launched by the aircraft carrier "Death" awaits the two heroes. The fighting gets even more intense when the two discover a giant fleet waiting for them beyond the asteroid belt. And beyond that, the aircraft carrier "Death"...

(A battle aircraft carrier with energy launchers befitting a warship.)

Sixth stage (base stage)

They have finally reached the Salamander army's homeworld. But it was a desolate, aged world, soon to perish. A fleet of warships stands between the two heroes and the homeworld. But the two heroes successfully penetrate the homeworld, evading numerous attacks, delving deep into the base to finally face the statue protecting Salamander.
And beyond that...

Sorry for keeping you waiting.

This is the long-awaited draft for the stage progression.

The final stage hasn't been completed yet and is currently unknown. We'll continue this [scribble] way, I think.

Wow!

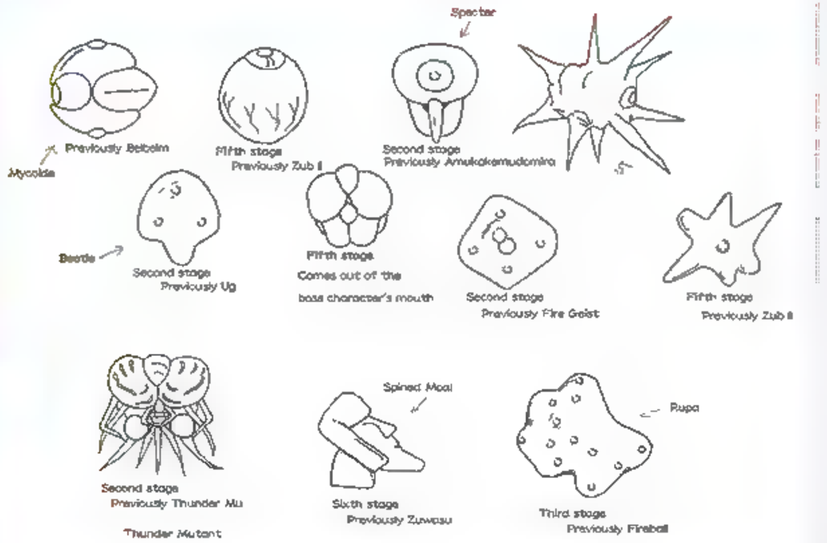
Well, let's do our best then.

I'm counting on you!

2/2

● Rough drafts of enemies 1 2 3 4 5

1



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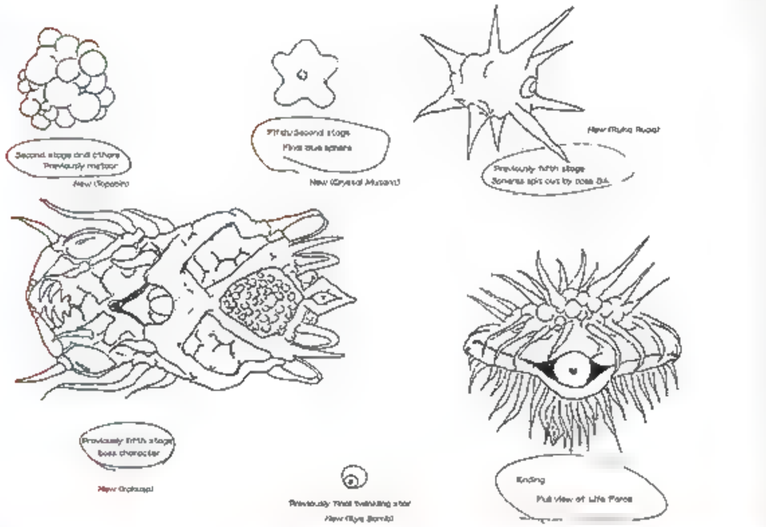

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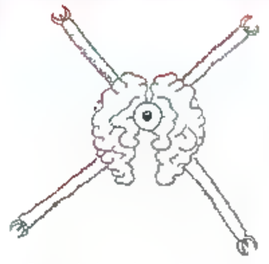
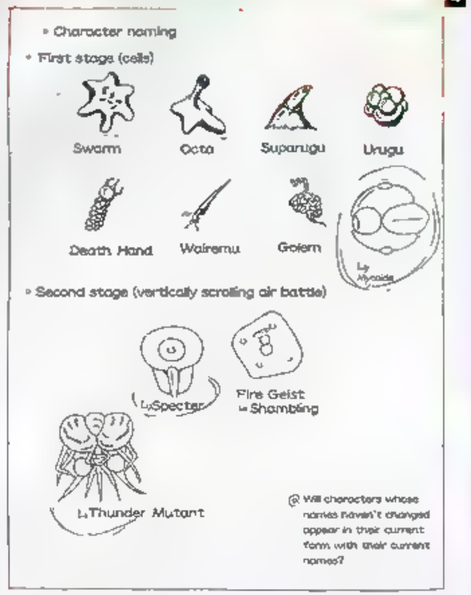


Second stage boss character

Sairan

4



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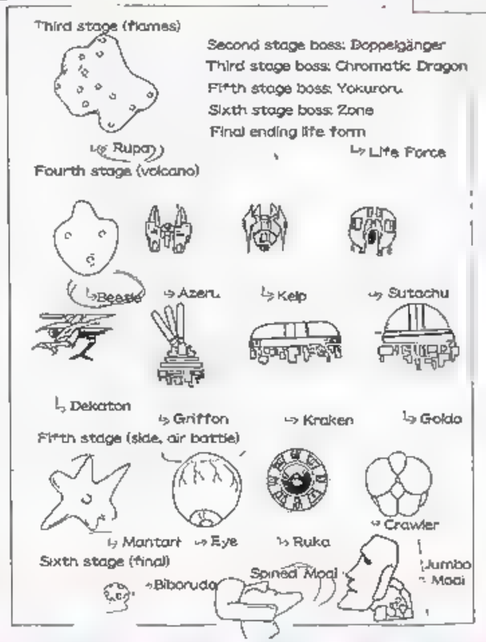
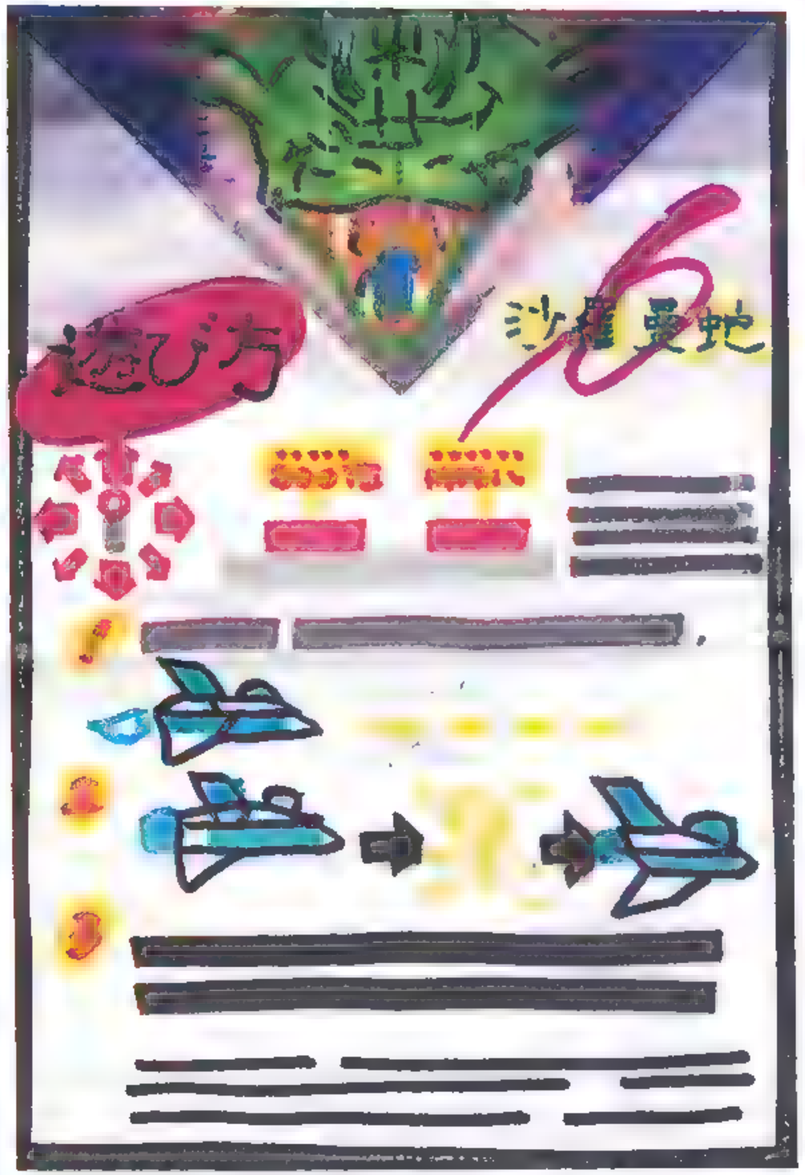


From the development stage of the 1987 Japanese exclusive edition of *Life Force*. Here you can see familar characters from the original version of *Life Force*, as well as new characters with a more organic design.

● Rough draft of the instruction card 1



● Rough draft of the instruction card 2

Game Showcase & Design Documents

● Arcade flyer (front)

GRAB THE KIT THAT HAS THE POWER!
LIFE FORCE
KONAMI
Revive Your Games With The Burning Power Of LIFE FORCE. This Hot New Kit Takes The Player On An Incredible Journey And Challenges Their Skill Every Step Of The Way. Superior Graphics & Great Game Play Add Up To A Powerful Package You Shouldn't Live Without.
LIFE FORCE FEATURES:
2 PERSON INTERACTIVE PLAY
BUY IN FEATURE
KONAMI
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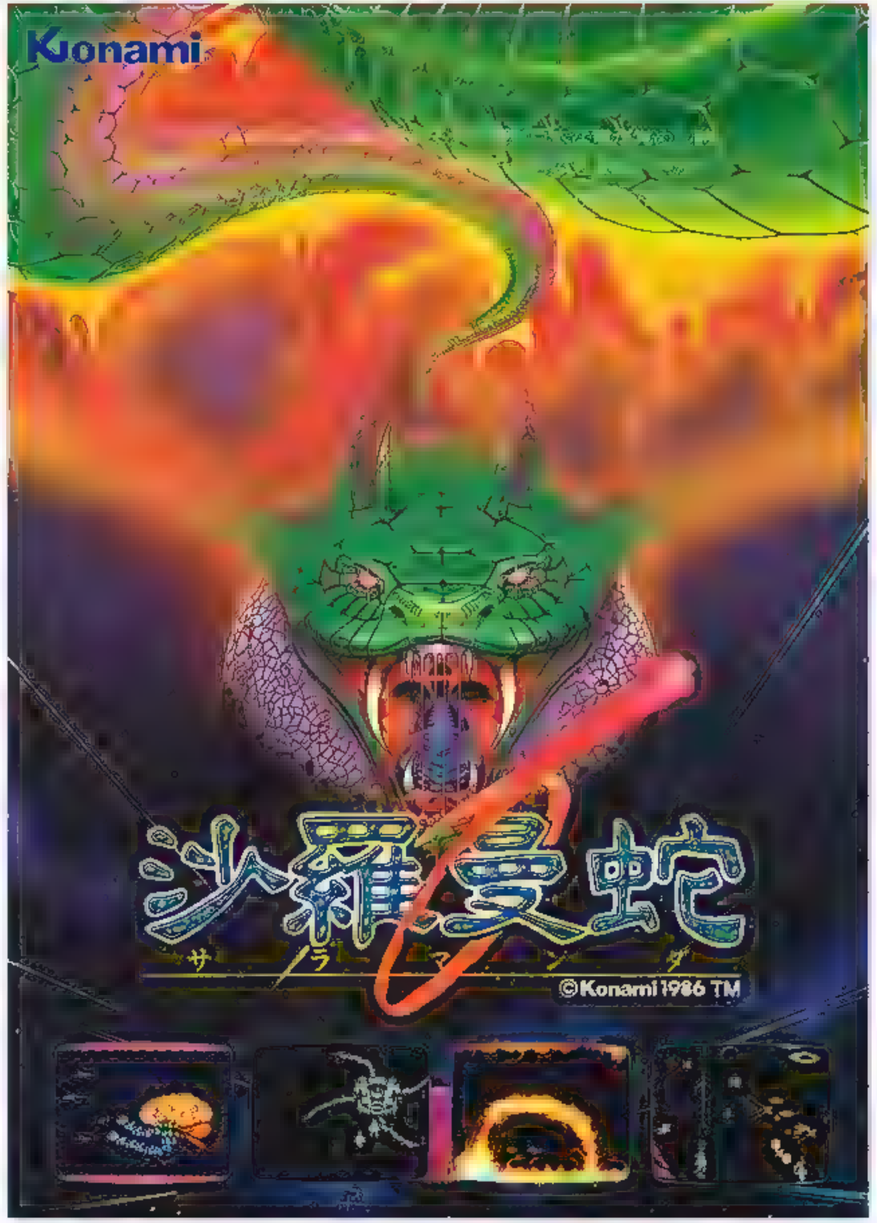
● Arcade flyer (Japan)



TYPHOON

Released 1987

The human race launches its final counterattack.

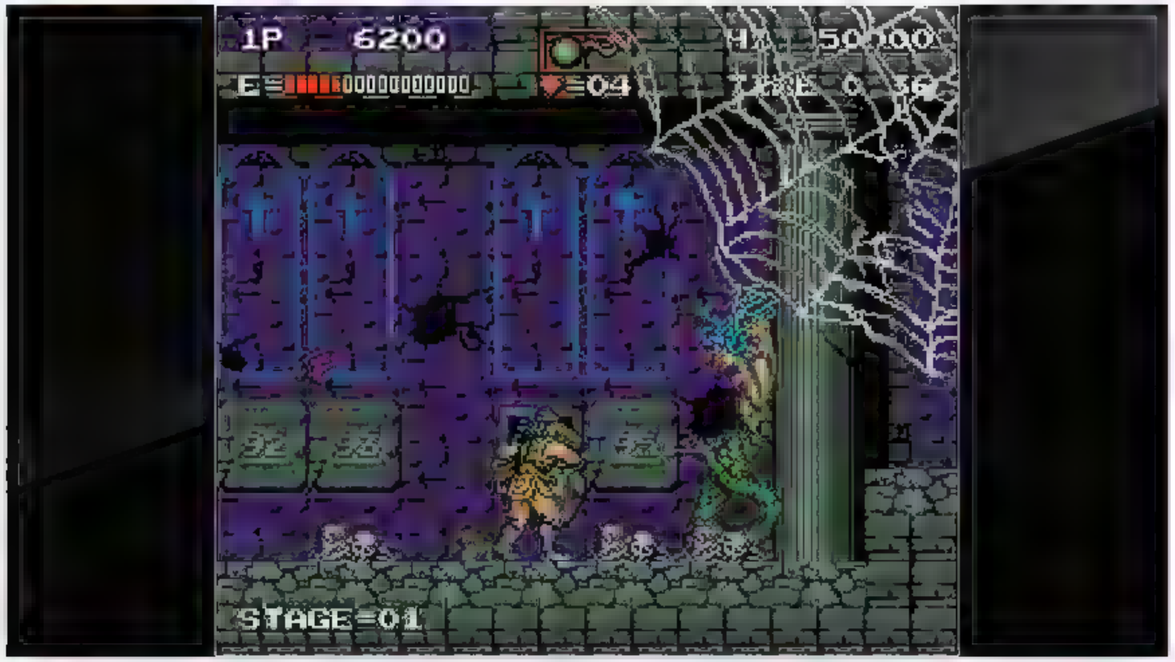
Typhoon received rave reviews for its mix of vertically-scrolling 2D stages and 3D stages, along with its flashy presentation making full use of rotation, expansion, and reduction effects. In the story, the special combat unit "A-Jax" sallies forth to put an end to the invasion of a nuclear superpower and alien army at the request of the UN. The player takes control of a supersonic helicopter for the 2D stages, and a fighter jet for the 3D stages. It goes without saying that what made this game stand out were the 3D stages that made use of the latest technology of the time. The way the fighters and missiles come flying from within the screen, as well as the how clouds grow larger and disappear provide the thrilling sensation of racing through the skies. It's still impressive, even after all this time. The 2D stages feature power-ups, with the nature of the upgrade item changing as time passes, so players needed to pick them up at the right moment to enhance their vehicle.

HAUNTED CASTLE

Released 1988

The legend will again be stained by blood.

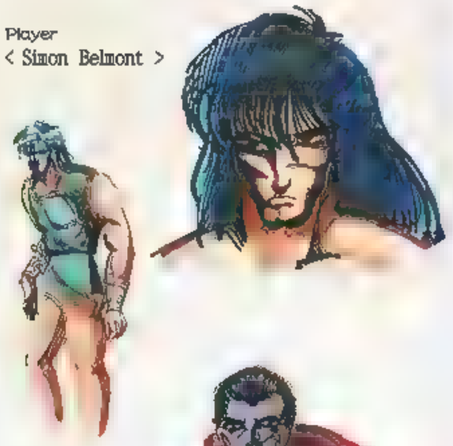
Based upon the popularity of *Castlevania* on the NES, *Haunted Castle* was released as an arcade version of the game with various upgrades such as fresh graphics and level design. The story depicts the quest of Simon, descendant of the Belmont clan and heir to the Vampire Killer whip. He sets out to destroy Count Dracula, who has risen from his 100-year slumber thanks to the ritual of his heretic followers and kidnapped his bride Serena. This game features all of the intensely-challenging gameplay and whip attacks that define the series. The graphics were a stark improvement over those of the home console version, with many noting how realistic and smooth Simon's movements were. There are six stages in total, with confrontations with with fearsome bosses like Medusa, a golem, and Frankenstein awaiting at the end of each one. The soundtrack that brings life to the game contains many popular tracks, and are well worth listening to while playing the game. Will you be able to defeat Count Dracula and save your bride?



Game Showcase & Design Documents

Protagonist and boss art 1

Player
< Simon Belmont >



Stage 6 boss
<Dracula>

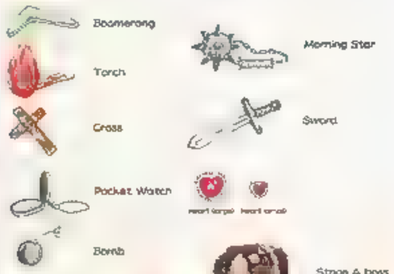
Protagonist and boss art 2

Stage 5 boss
<Frankenstein>

Protagonist and boss art 3

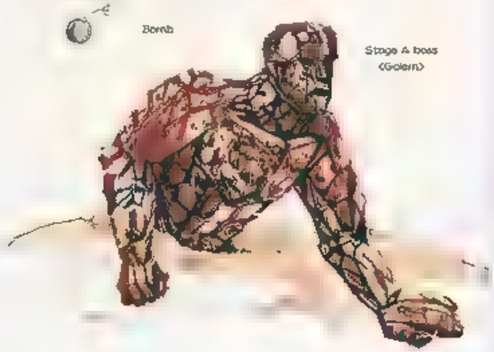
Stage 3 boss
<Stained Glass Warrior>

Stage 2 boss
<Skeleton Snake>



Protagonist and boss art 4

Stage 4 boss
<Golem>



VULCAN VENTURE

Released 1988

Shoot the core!

Vulcan Venture was the much anticipated second installment in the *Gradius* series. Set two years after the events of *Nemesis*, the story this time sees Vic Viper called to battle once more to eradicate Gofer, a special force from the Bacterion cluster that is assaulting the planet Gradius yet again. The power-up system from *Nemesis* remains, with players being able to choose between four upgrades. Increased variety in the power-ups themselves, like highly destructive spread bombs and ring-shaped pulse lasers, expanded the style of gameplay available. *Vulcan Venture* has eight stages, many of which captivated players with ideas that were revolutionary for the time. For example, the wide range of movement up or down in the first stage set at an artificial sun, or the succession of battles with bosses from the Bacterion cluster in Stage 7 that were in past titles like *Nemesis* and *Life Force*.

Vulcan Venture Design Documents

Design Documents 1

These are original design sheets. Some of the provisional titles like "Nemesis Returns" for the game, which was also referred to as "GX785" during planning, were quite different from the final outcome. The plan for the story was to have Vic Viper take on the Neo Bacterions.

Nemesis Returns (working title)

GX785 Nemesis II planning documents

Game Concept

A perfect "NAMY it" with further developed strengths (characteristics) of GX686 (Nemesis) and the impact of GX587 (Life Force).

Marketing points

By combining the playability of the hit game Nemesis with the spectacular nature of Life Force, an excellent and accessible playability was achieved.

Uses the same Power Ups as in Nemesis to give the player a challenging KONAMI experience.

Different scenes are made more interesting by incorporating many changes into the backgrounds.

Detailed animations such as when using a Power Up or dying improved, realistic-looking impactful scenes developed further

By making full use of powerful hardware capacity (Twin 16 System), players will be amazed and be begging to see more of the spectacular visuals not seen in other games.

The inclusion of "Easter eggs" give players more to talk about.

Target demographic

Appropriate for everyone from first-timers to hardcore gamers.

Game type

Shooting game

Design Documents 2

Game content

The player controls his/her own vessel (Vic Viper) with the 8-direction stick and missile and power up buttons, destroying waves of attacking enemies to proceed.

Story

Two years after the battle against the destructive Bacterion star cluster, the planet Gradius had recovered from the wounds left by war and its desolated cities had recovered bit by bit.
However, peace did not last long.
The remaining Bacterions had spent two years amassing a new force and came looking for another fight.
The planet Gradius' defense forces quickly dispatched the entire fleet to quickly initiate an all-out assault on the enemy home base, Bacterius.
But they did not find Bacterius and instead fell into a trap which wiped out all of Gradius' forces.
It looked as if there was nothing left to stop the furious, overwhelming onslaught of the Neo Bacterions.
At that moment, an old model space fighter appeared.

Screen appearance and scrolling

Parallel scrolling. Forced X-scroll from right to left.

In principle there is a 2-screen loop on the Y axis (fixed depending on position). (Speed changes based on player position.)

Controls, Power Ups

8-directional stick

Design Documents 3

3 Shifting earth crust stage

A volcano erupts and meteors come flying out
Ground fissures
Protrusions, cave-ins, collapses
Molten lava fall

Moai Stage

Searches for the player

Revolving Moai Cannon
Hopping Moai
Big Moai (this stage's boss)
Petit Moai (spit out by Big Moai)

5 Stage in which the player destroys walls to proceed

The destructible walls like in Nemesis Stage 6 (GX1 are outlined on a map like in Nemesis Stage 2 (Stomshoot)

6 Enemy warships and inside of a giant ship

Escaping the enemy fleet,
In the end there is a giant warship and the player enters inside through a hatch.

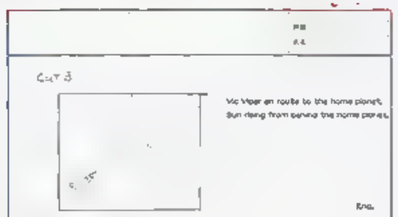
Screen

Design Documents 4

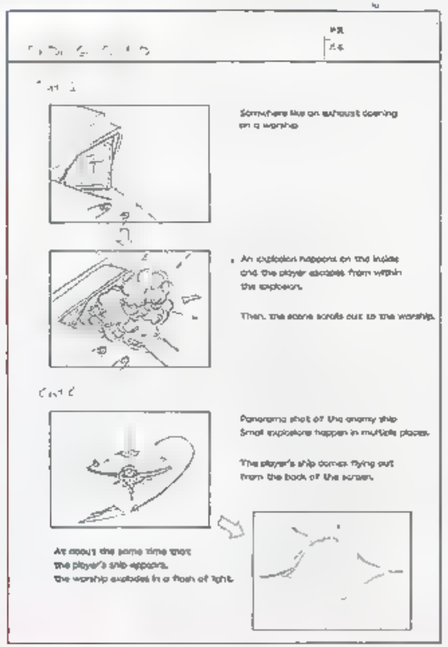
Design Documents 1

Vulcan Venture story

The planet Gradius floats in space like an oasis.
The mysterious Zeus strike force from the Bacterion star cluster has attacked Gradius.
Gradius repelled the invasion with its hyperspace fighter, Vic Viper
But the evil hand of the Bacterions reached not only for Gradius, but for the water planet Watis as well.
Thanks to Gradius' help, Watis defeated the elite Salamander army.
But soon after, a new enemy would threaten Gradius.



Design Documents 2


Somewhere like an exhaust opening on a warship
An explosion happens on the inside and the player escapes from within the explosion.
Then, the scene scrolls out to the warship.
Cut 2
Panorama shot of the enemy ship
Small explosions happen in multiple places.
The player's ship comes flying out from the back of the screen.
At about the same time that the player's ship appears, the warship explodes in a flash of light.

Design Documents 3

Confidential development notes 1

AC Vulcan Venture Team

① The map data for the artificial sun stage was lost during development.
The only thing that could be done was to use fragments and stitch them together with software.

② The tails of the Fire Dragons coming out of the artificial sun won't hit the player.

Confidential development notes 2

③ Originally there was scenery in the volcano stage that looked so similar to Nemesis (even the developers couldn't tell it apart) that the colors and shapes were changed.

④ The volcano stage was the last one to be created.
There wasn't enough time to finish the boss character in time, so the team ended up using a Life Force boss character.

⑦ The Revenge of Moai stage was the first one to be created.
The Big Moai was first facing sideways, but because the mouth was in front both at the top and bottom, the top Moai's direction was reversed to eliminate the blind spot.

⑨ During on-location testing the Petit Moais were invincible, but because a hardcore gamer at one of the arcades where the team was testing the game said that this extreme difficulty was unfair the team made it possible to destroy the Petit Moais.

⑪ The giant sphere in the high speed maze stage should rotate vertically when you consider how it moves, and in fact that's how it moved at first. But because a sideways rotating sprite looked cooler, the team ended up using sideways rotation.

⑪ The Rgolist was originally supposed to be removed because it was too silly, but because it proved to be entertaining during a rough demo version (which the team called "Ducker Theater"), it ended up staying in the game.

⑫ But it was changed a lot, and just the sprite alone was changed four to five times.

⑬ A surprisingly large number of people haven't noticed this, but when you put in your name, the character's face will change when you change the age.You should check out the old geezer's face.

⑭ The base cannons inside the Gofer ship can't shoot beyond the angle of their blind spot, because the sprites weren't made in that many directions.

⑮ The square hit zone of Gofer stayed square because "Mr.K," who was in charge of sprites, didn't hand over the hit zone data.

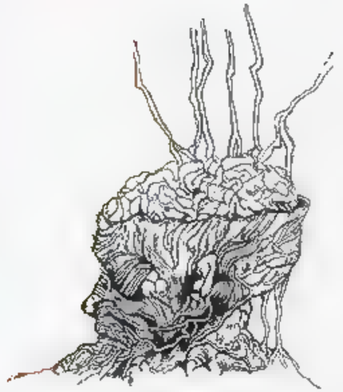
⑯ The "tank" enemy that ran around carrying cannons or Popping Moais and appeared in all sorts of places during development ended up not appearing anywhere due to a stage setting oversight.
The sprite and code are both in the game, so if you ever see it, you're lucky.

Team Vulcan Venture staff

Confidential development notes 3

Enemy illustrations 1 2 3 4

1



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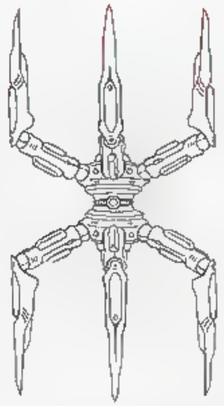
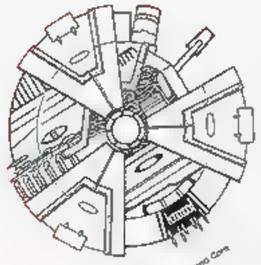


Crab

3 4



Enemy illustrations 2 5 6 7

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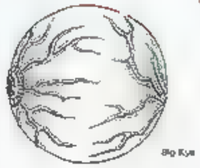


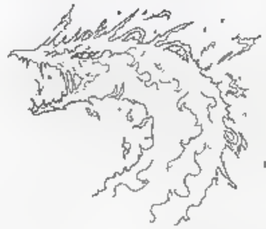
Big Eye

Sazal

Mapping Mool

Big Mool

6



Fire Dragon

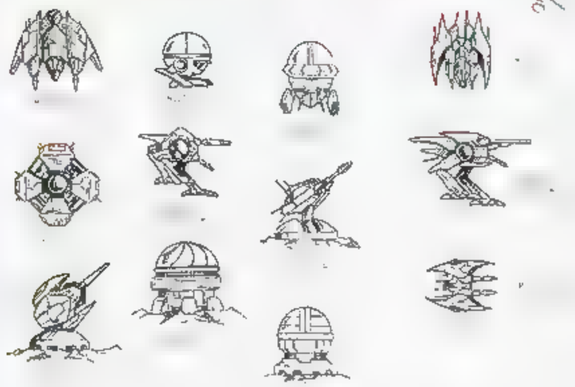
Petit Mool

7

Phoenix

Enemy illustrations 3 8 9 10 11

8



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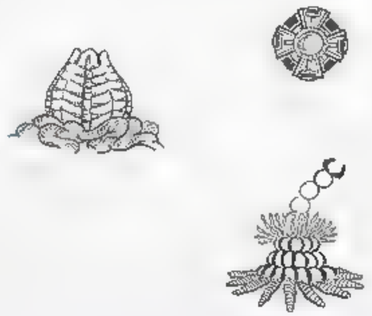

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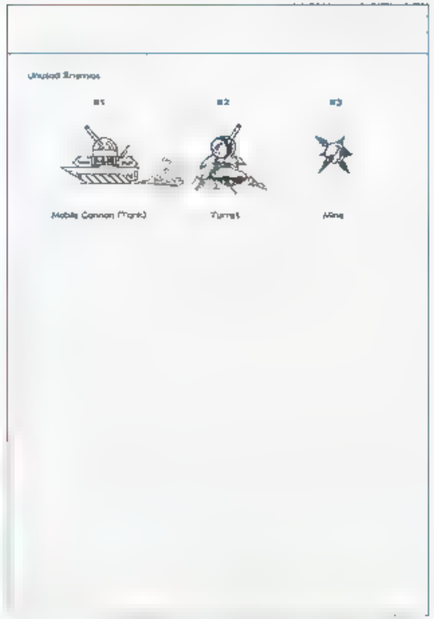

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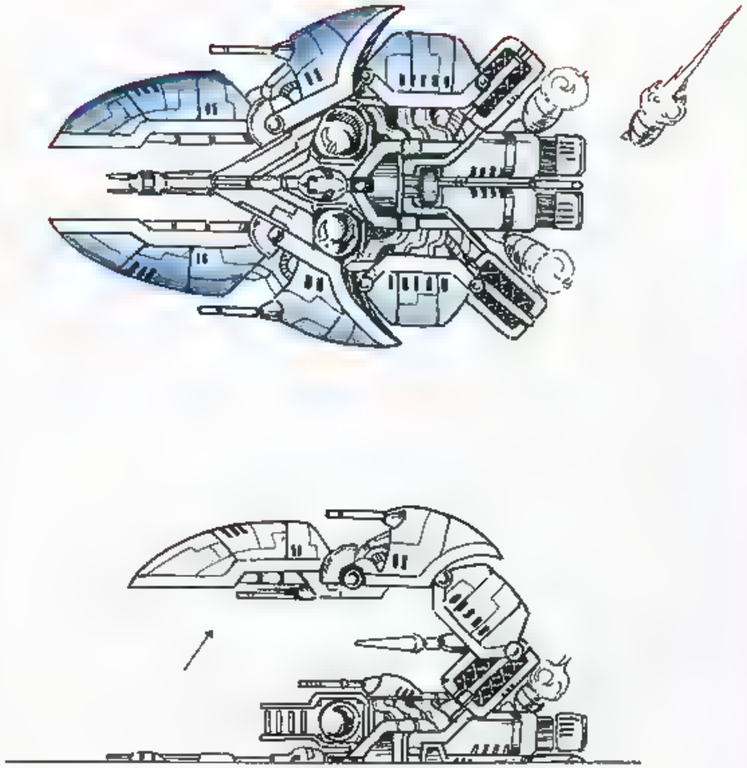
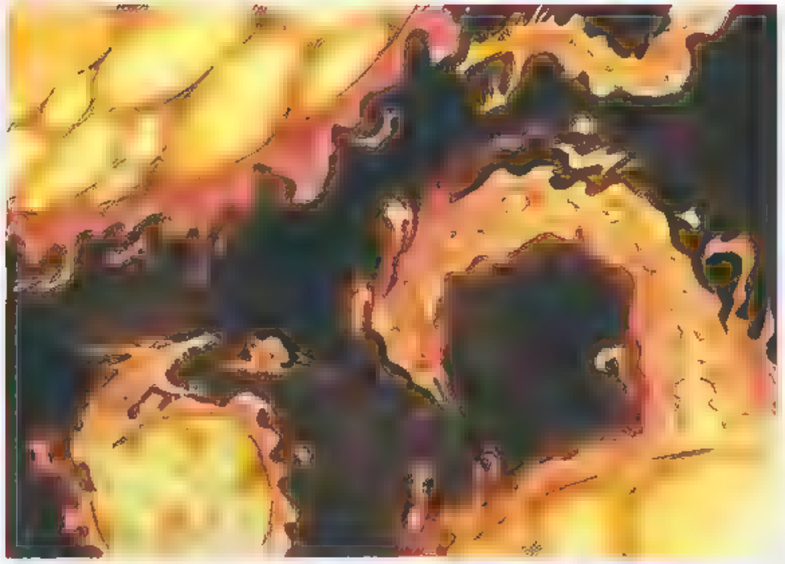


● Rough stage map (Stage 5)

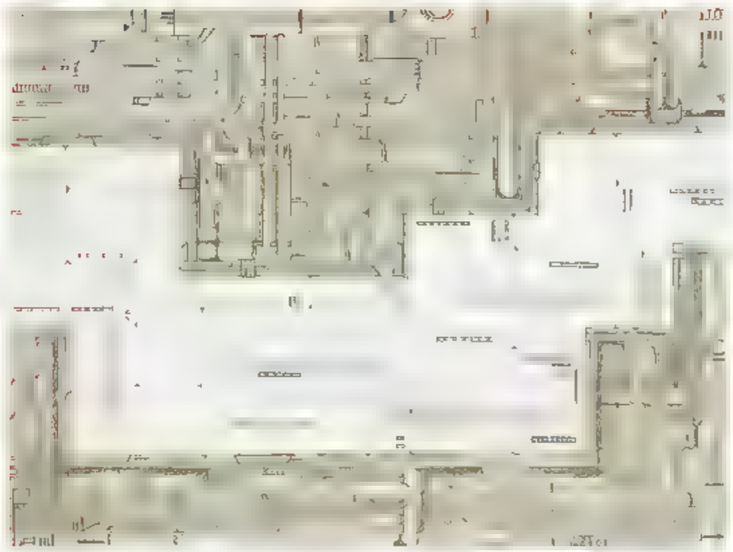
A sketch detailing things such as enemy placement in Stage 5, the "Revenge of Moai" stage, for use in making the map. It is actually a single large document composed of several pieces of specialized graph paper connected together. The positions of the Moai were noted in detail even at the rough draft phase and remained pretty much the same in the finished version of the stage.

Game Showcase & Design Documents

● Stage idea art 1



● Stage idea art 2

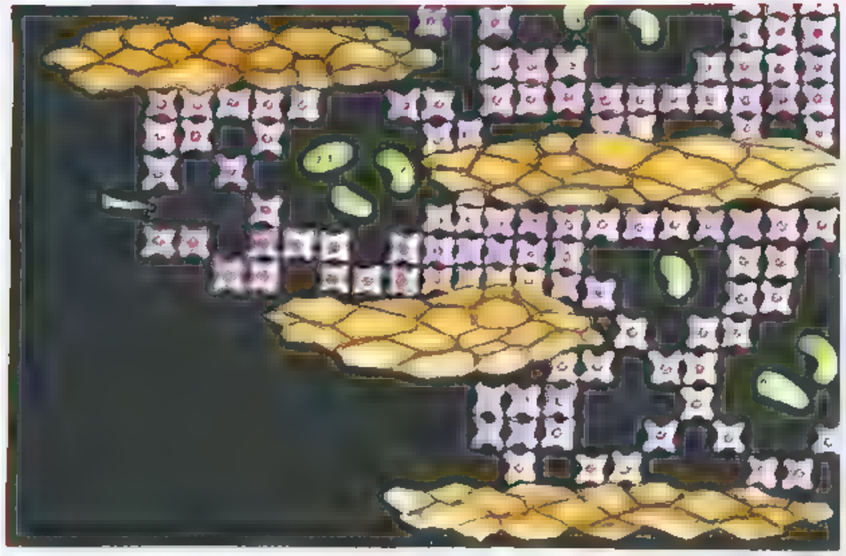


● Stage idea art 3

● Stage idea art 4

Game Showcase & Design Documents

● Stage idea art (unused) 1



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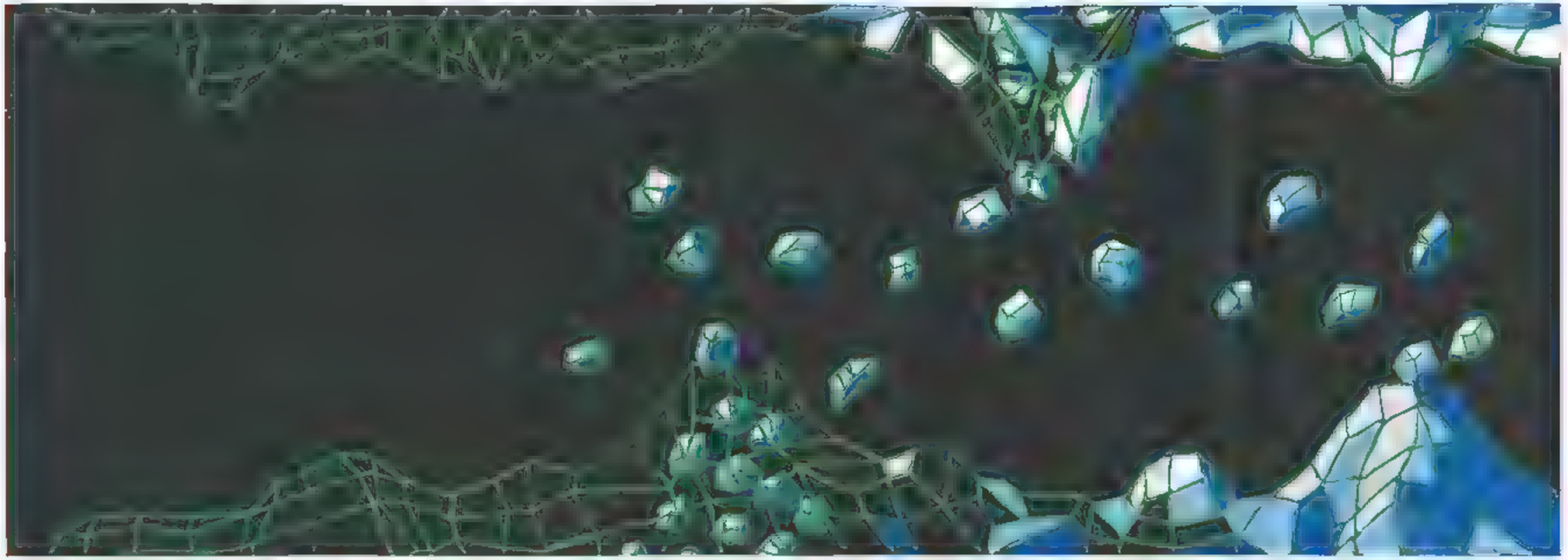
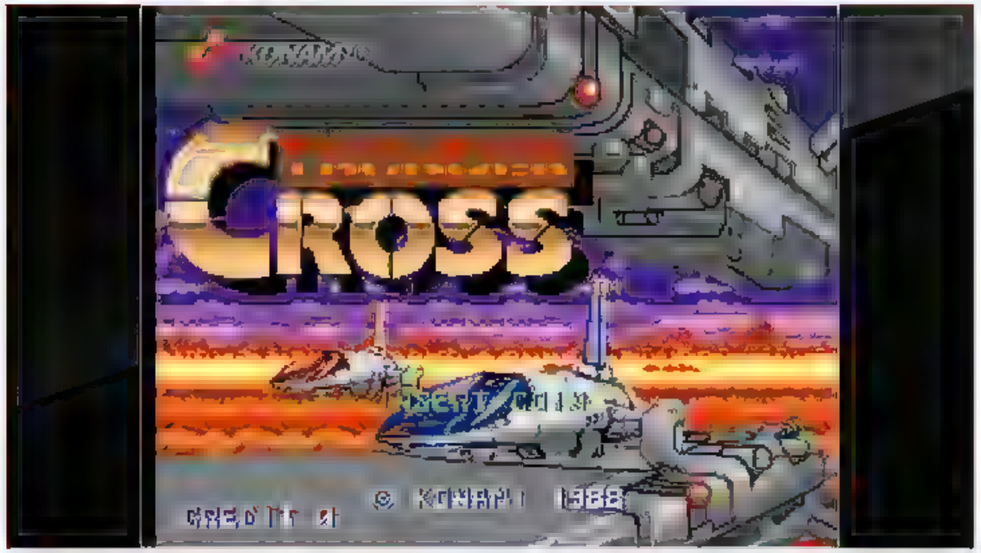


Conceptual illustrations for the stages of *Vulcan Venture*. Sketch 1 doesn't resemble any of the stages found in the game, and was most likely drawn during the planning phase of production. Sketch 2 looks to be a mixture of things found in Stages 3 and 4, but was also not used in the final game.

Game Showcase & Design Documents

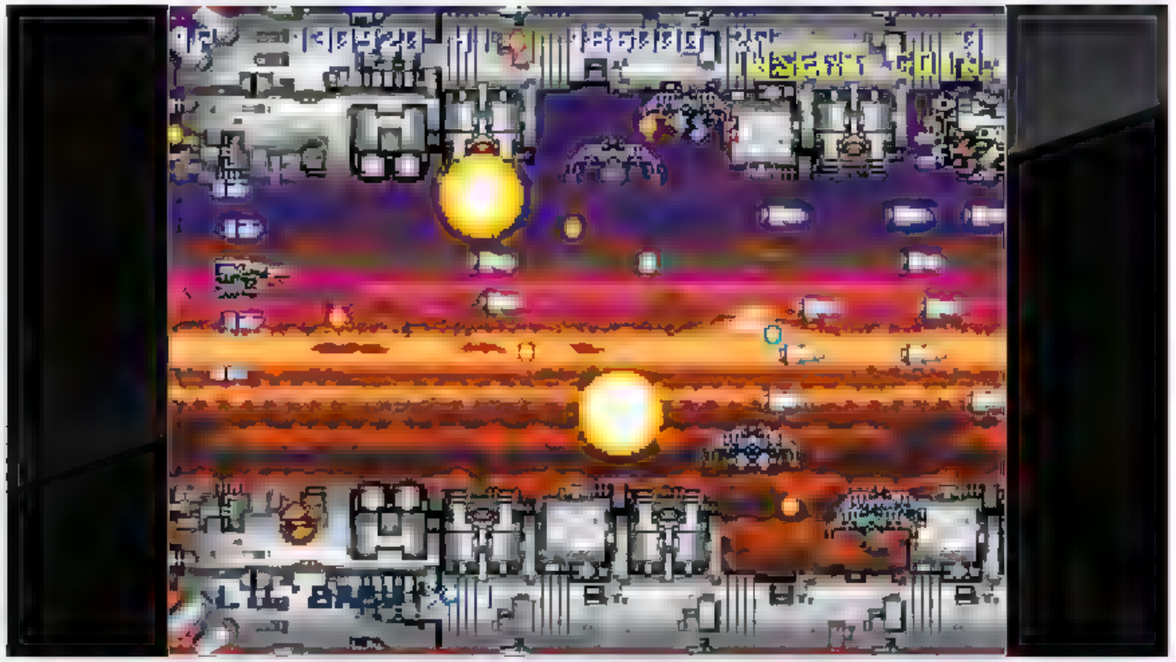


THUNDER CROSS

Released:1988

Wipe out the Mechanikon hordes!!

Players take control of the Blue Thunder M-45 to do battle with a mechanized army in the side-scrolling shoot 'em up *Thunder Cross*. The familiar Option weapons from the *Gradius* series takes center stage in this game. Whereas Options followed behind the player as they moved in *Nemesis*, here they attached above and below the ship, with players being able to adjust the space between them. However, it sets itself apart from *Nemesis* and *Life Force* by introducing innovative weaponry like a boomerang shot that changes directions when it collides with a wall or object, as well as a macro laser, a flamethrower, and napalm shots as they powered-up their ship. The North American version was changed greatly, with one example being the removal of the ability to adjust the interval between Options and its replacement with the ability to use a bomb that vaporized enemies and enemy shots on the screen.



Thunder Cross Design Documents

Design sheets 1 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

1

Design sheets

2

Story

In star system 1124 of the Milky Way's Free Star Region,
the fourth planet Marlyahna was attacked
by a non-humanoid intruding force.
Due to the immense destructive force of it,
the self-defense forces left the home planet to retreat
to their defensive base outside the star system,
and carried out multiple attacks to retake their home planet.
In a last ditch military effort, the self-defense force
opened a path leading to the orbit of their home planet
and began an assault on the enemy base.
Tragically, the brave fighters fell one by one.
Only two fighters managed to make it to the surface
of their home planet.
The task that lays before them now is to retake
the underground base occupied by the enemy, destroy
the entire enemy base and restore the space butterfly Tiffany
which is being used as a source of pure power energy.

The success of the mission depends on you!

3

About stages, screen composition and set pieces

Stage structure
The game is made up of 7 stages.

Stage 1 Ruins
Stage 2 Lake and Canyon (downward slope)
Stage 3 Cave
Stage 4 Graveyard
Stage 5 Base (up-and slope)
Stage 6 Sky Above Thunder Clouds
Stage 7 Floating Continent & Interior

The game will have seamless transitions between stages.
(Otherwise, we will lose some sense of speed.)
However, the game will display a message of some sort
at the end of each stage.

4

About the screen composition

Note: It's not in 3D

5

About the player

Sprite

Controls

8-directional stick Shot button Option control button

Power Ups

Speed up
Vulcan cannon
Option

How to deploy
Appears when certain enemies are defeated.

About Options

Up to 4 Options can orbit the ship at a time.

The Options can be combined with the Option control button (TRIG-B).
Press and hold the button to push out the Options. Release once that pose and hold again to put them back in.

6

About enemies

About minor enemies
Mechs generally have a hybrid insect/mechanical design.

Butterfly Wasp
Dragonfly Barnacle
Fly Roy (Medium)
Ladybug
Snail
Turtle

Their attacks will be similar to the animals' movement.

Example: The Butterfly attacks by flapping its wings.
The Dragonfly attacks swiftly, etc.

Special minor enemies

Roy

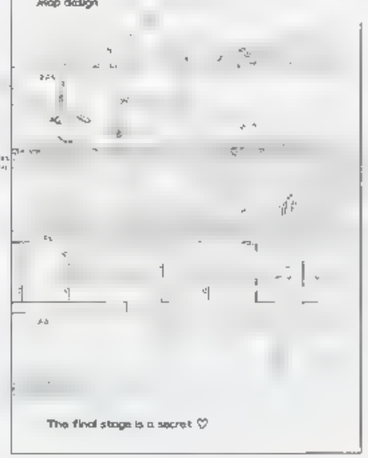
A medium-low enemy of about 64x64.
Is little stronger than minor enemies.

Ladybug

Drops to ground

7

Map design



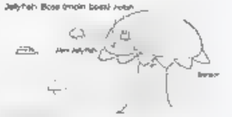
The final stage is a secret ♡

8

About bosses

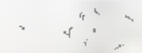
There are two kinds of bosses: organic and mechanical.
Explodes if you destroy the sensor!

Stage 1 (Ruins)
Jellyfish (Boss (main boss) type)



Stage 2 (Canyon and Lake)
Centipede (Boss (main boss))

Dog (medium boss)



01 Game Showcase & Design Documents

Design sheets 2 9 10 11 12 13 14

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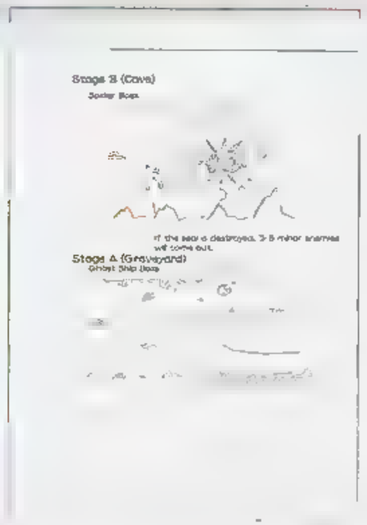

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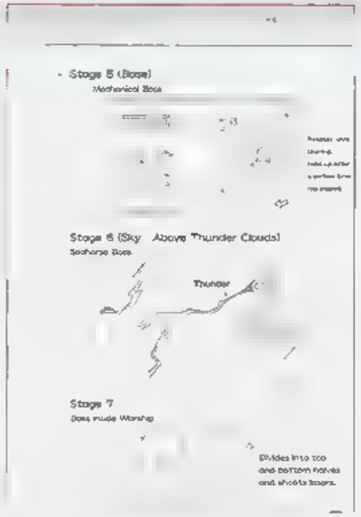

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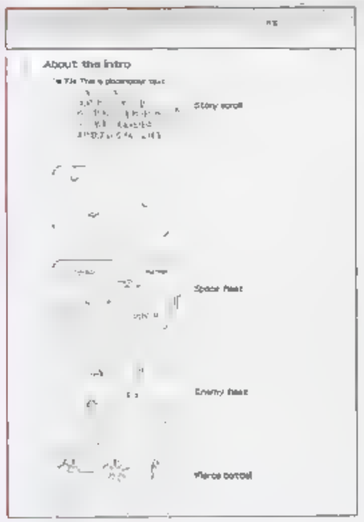

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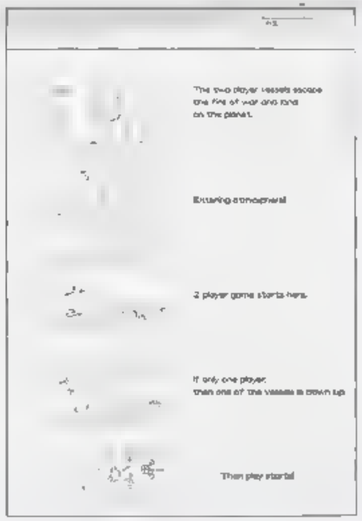
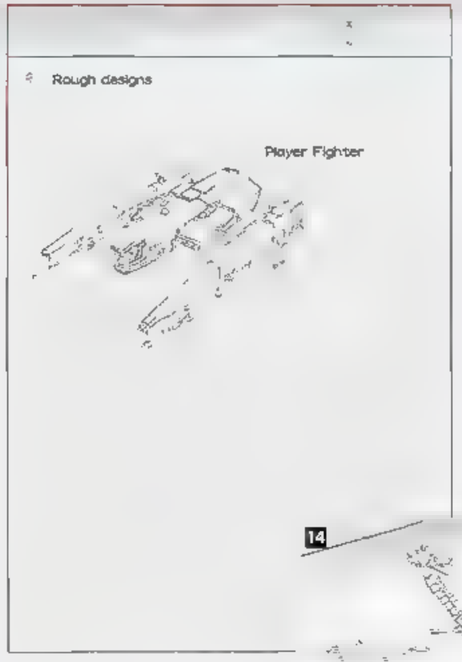
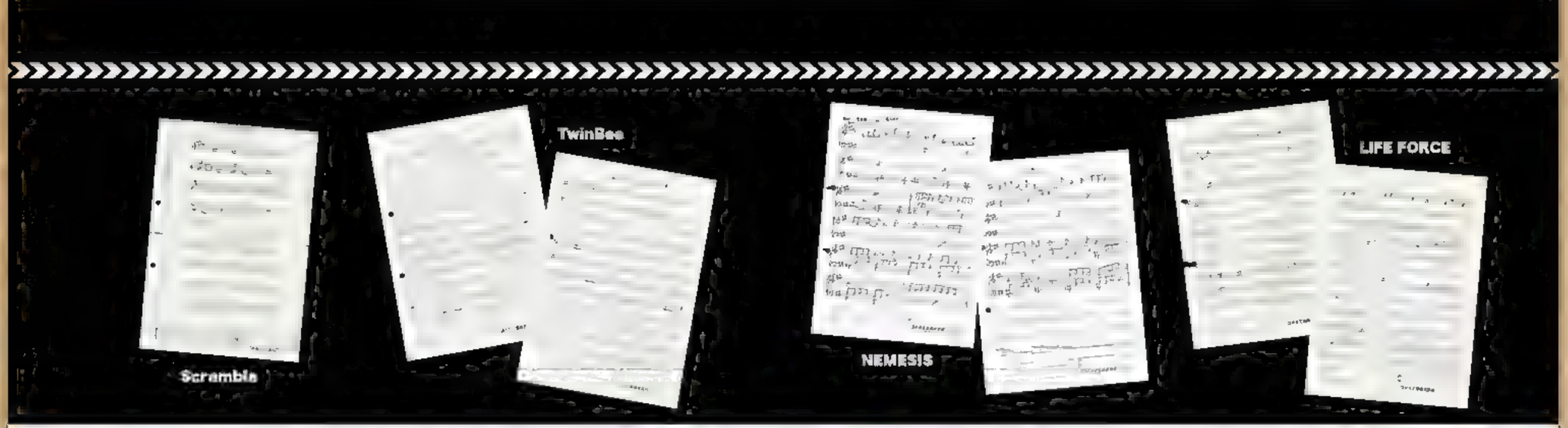

The two player vessels escape the fire of war and land on the planet.
Entering atmosphere!
2 player game starts here.
If only one player, then one of the vessels is blown up.
Then play starts!

13

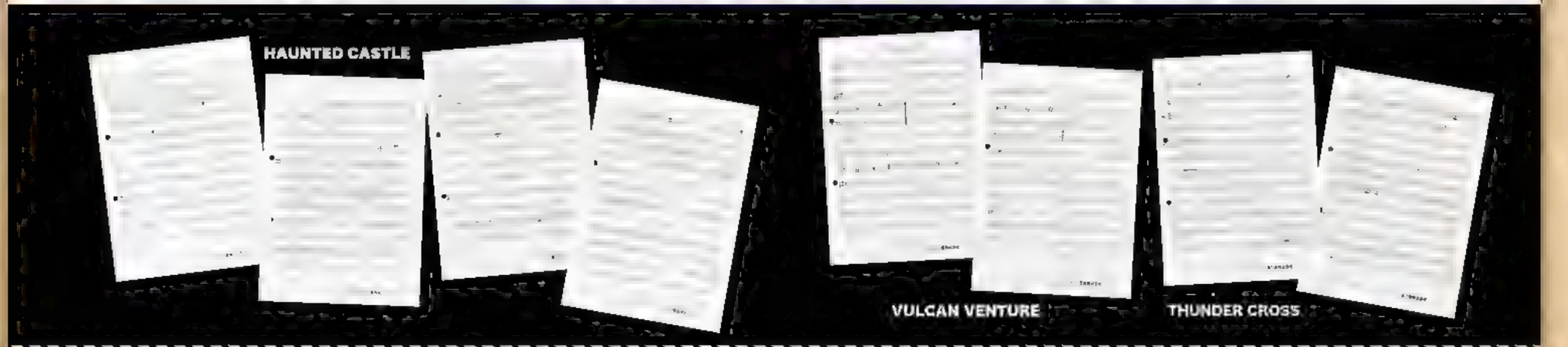


14

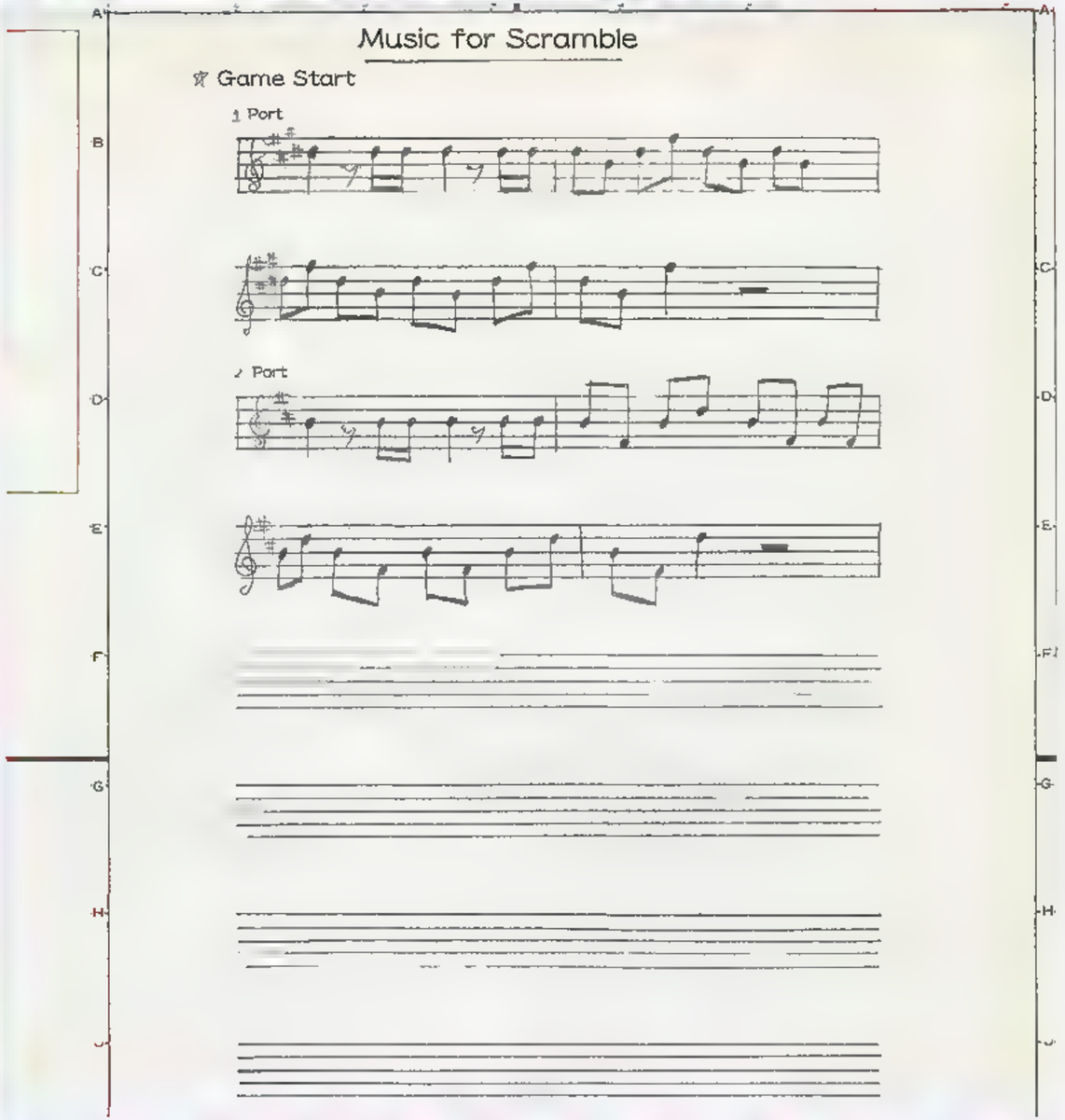
One of the two design sheets that remained from the materials for *Thunder Cross*. It would appear that the main game mechanics such as the ability to control Options were determined from the beginning of development. However, aspects such as the overall setting and enemies are drastically different than those seen in the final version of the game.



Chapter 2
Special Selection of Music Scores



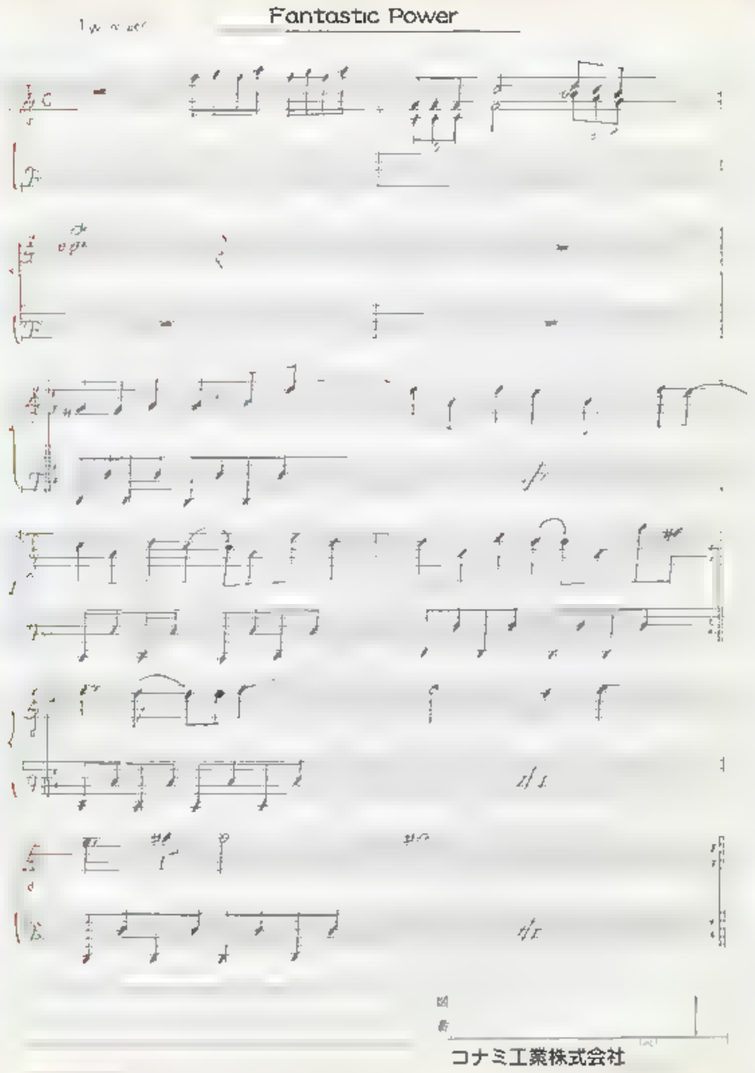
Scramble Score



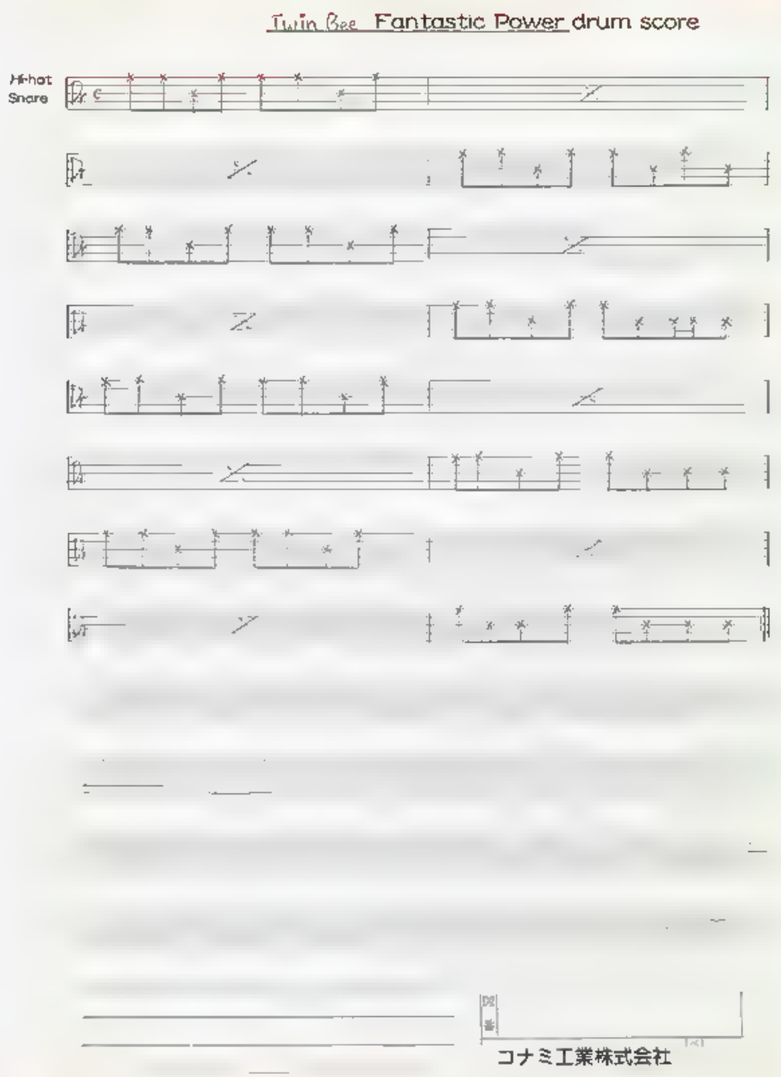
● Game Start

Special Selection of Music Scores

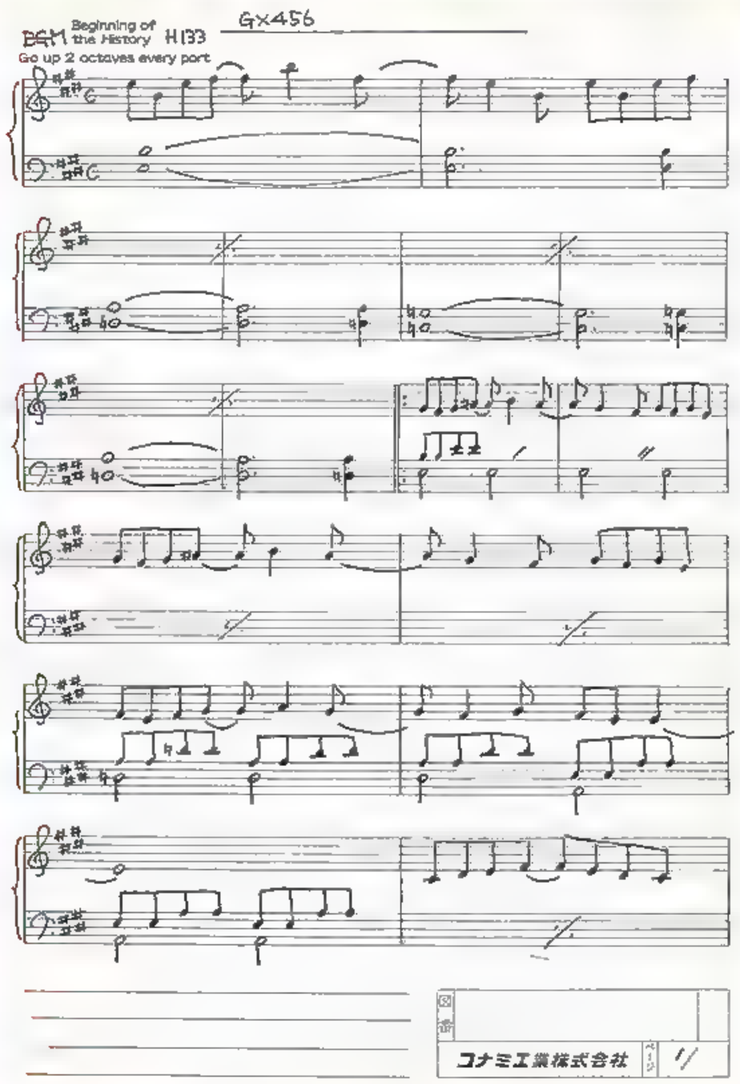
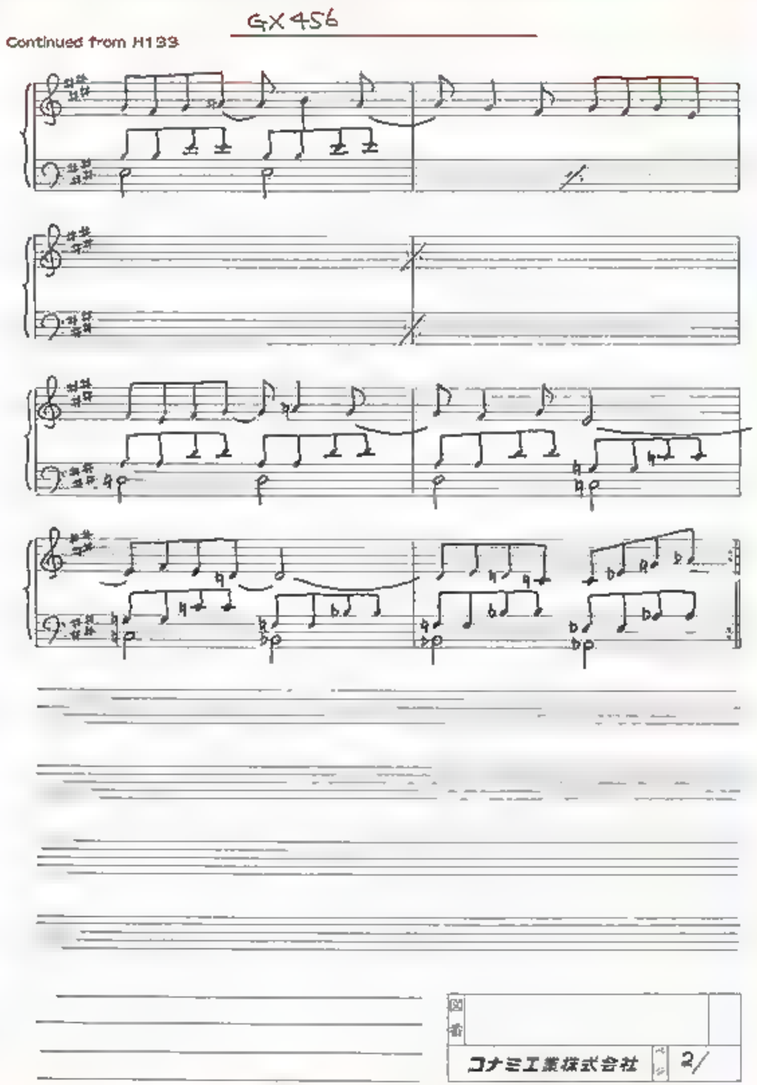
TwinBee Score



● Fantastic Power



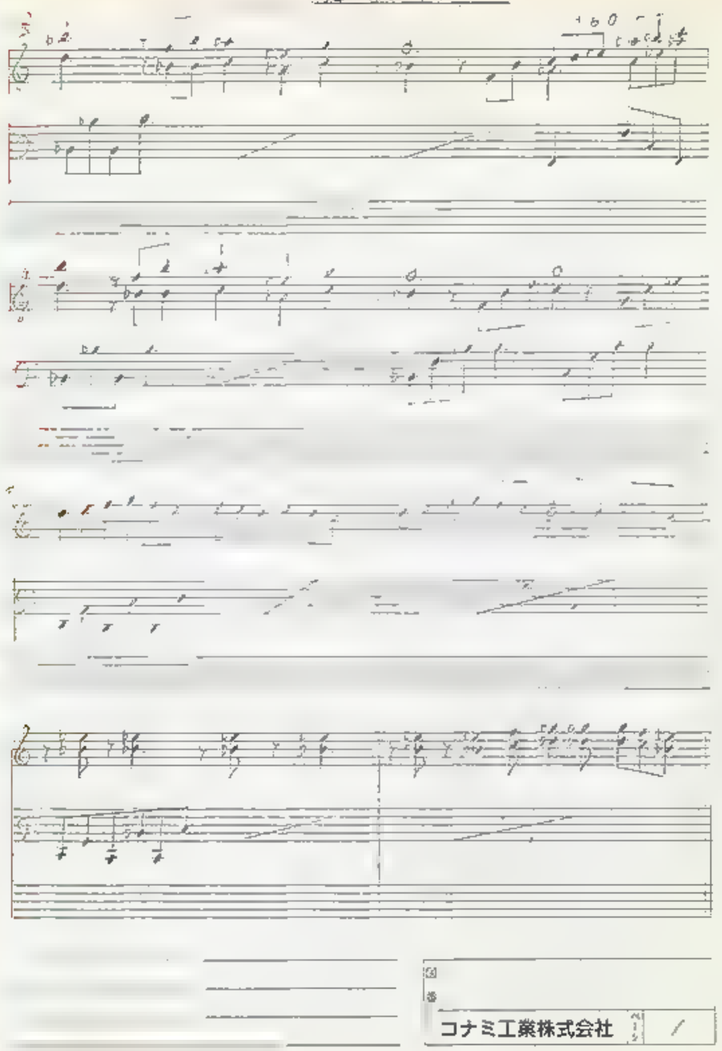
● Fantastic Power drum score

Nemesis Score

● Beginning of the History

● Beginning of the History

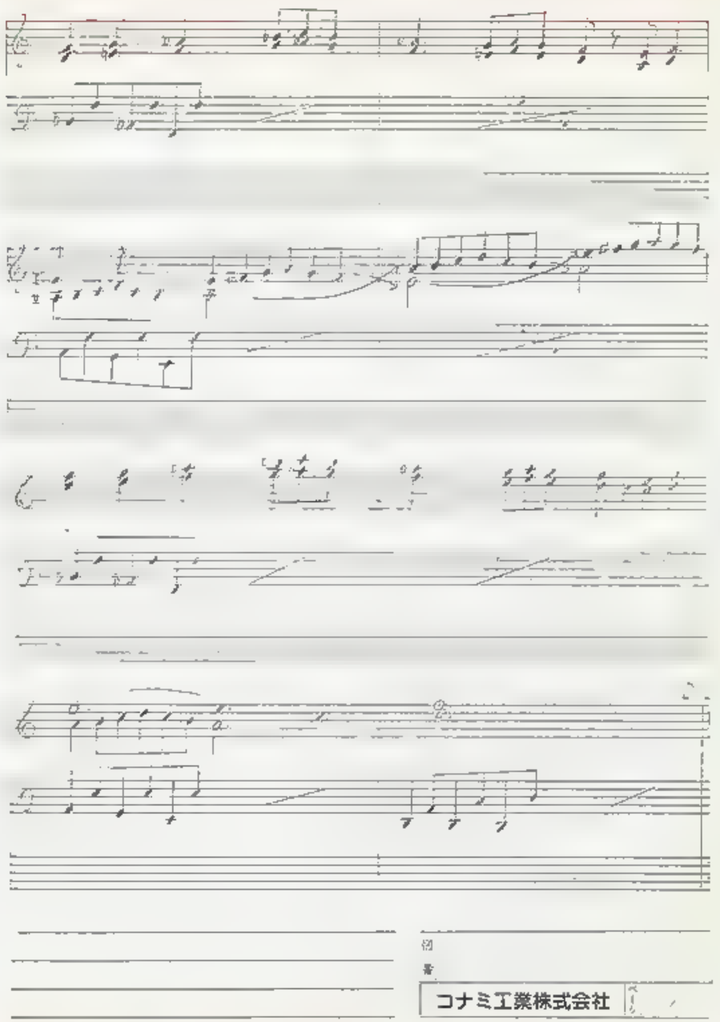
Special Selection of Music Scores

Life Force Score

1st Stage



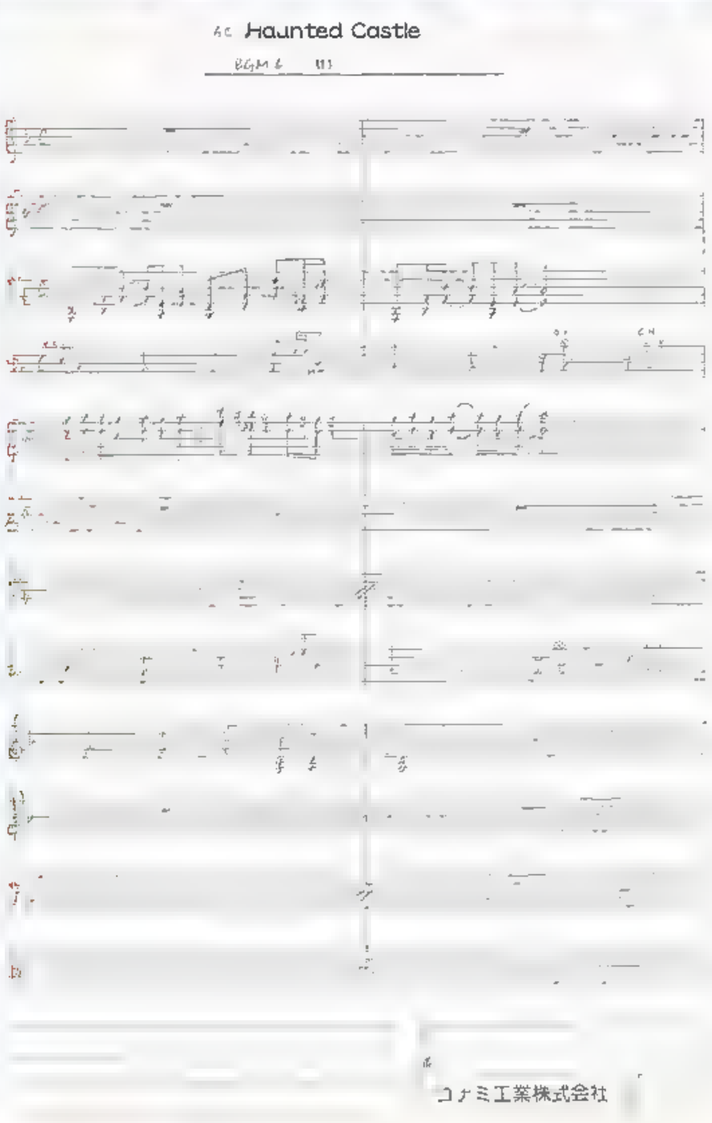
1st Stage BGM (2)



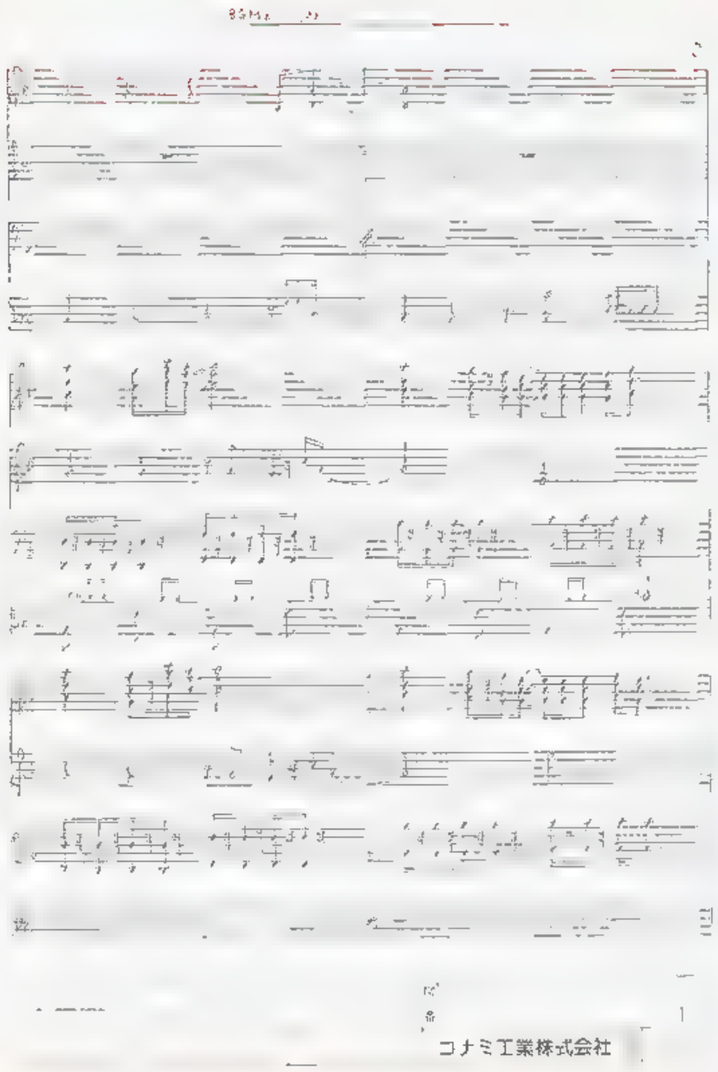
Special Selection of Music Scores

● Power of Anger

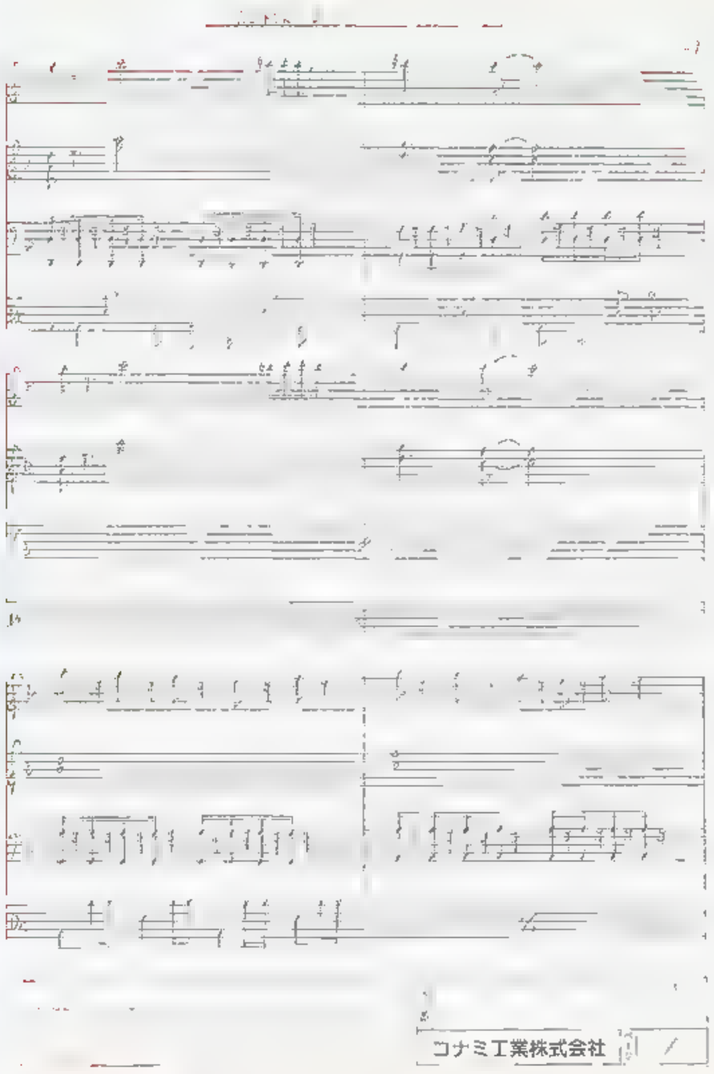
Haunted Castle Score



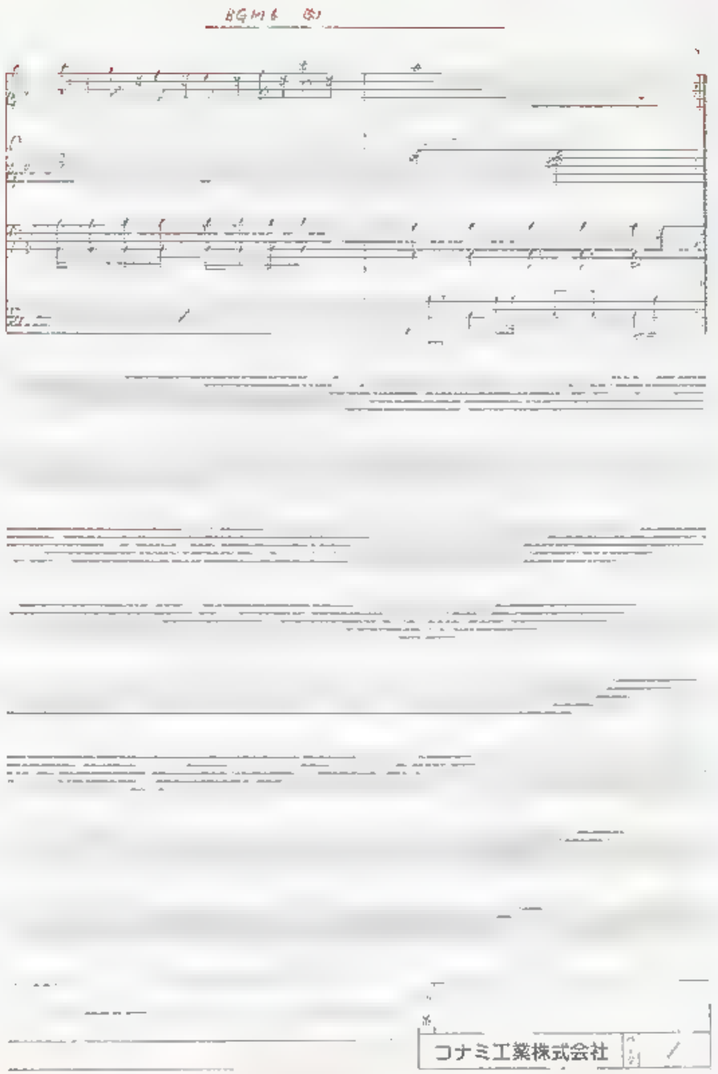
● Can't Wait Until the Night



● Can't Wait Until the Night

Special Selection of Music Scores

● Can't Wait Until the Night

Special Selection of Music Scores

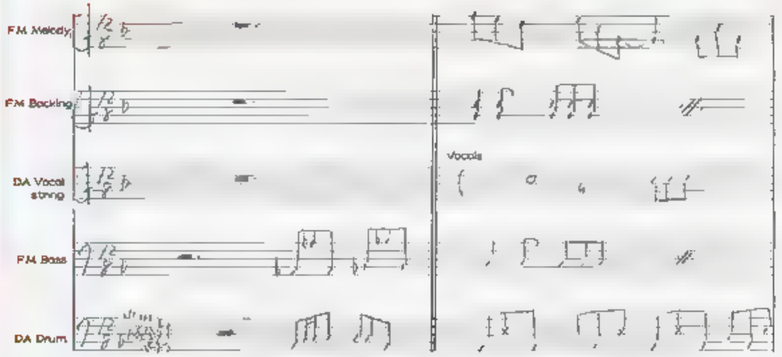
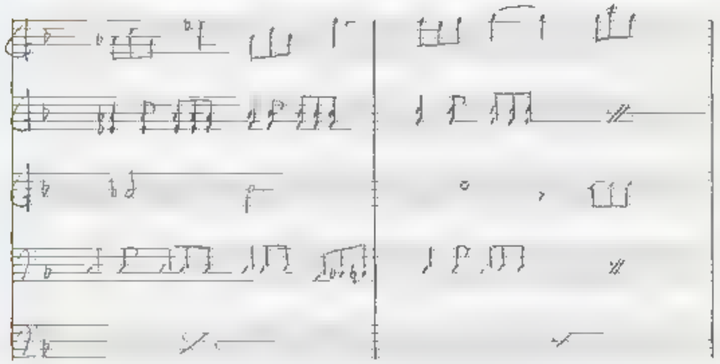


● Can't Wait Until the Night

Vulcan Venture Score

Vulcan Venture 1st Stage BGM

Burning Heat

22



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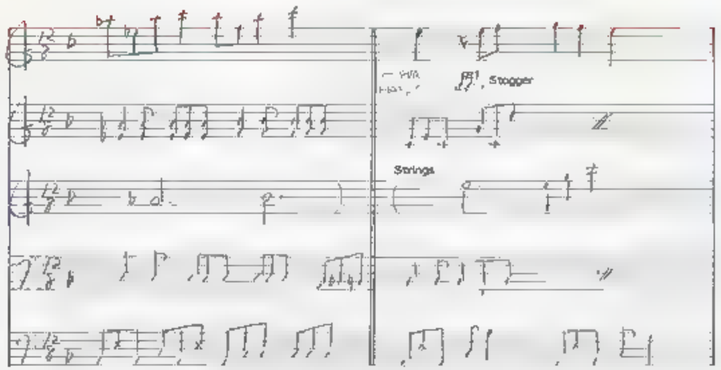
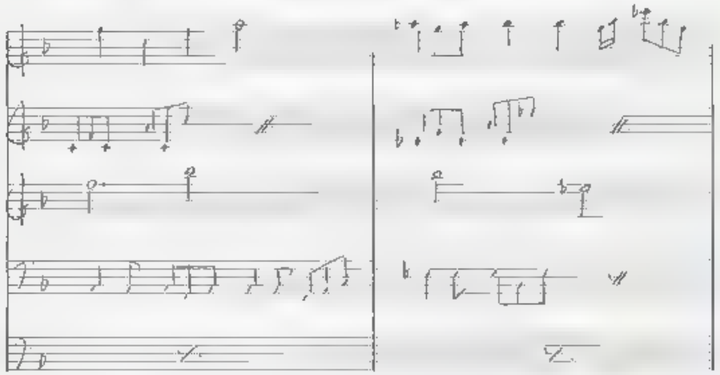
● Burning Heat

23

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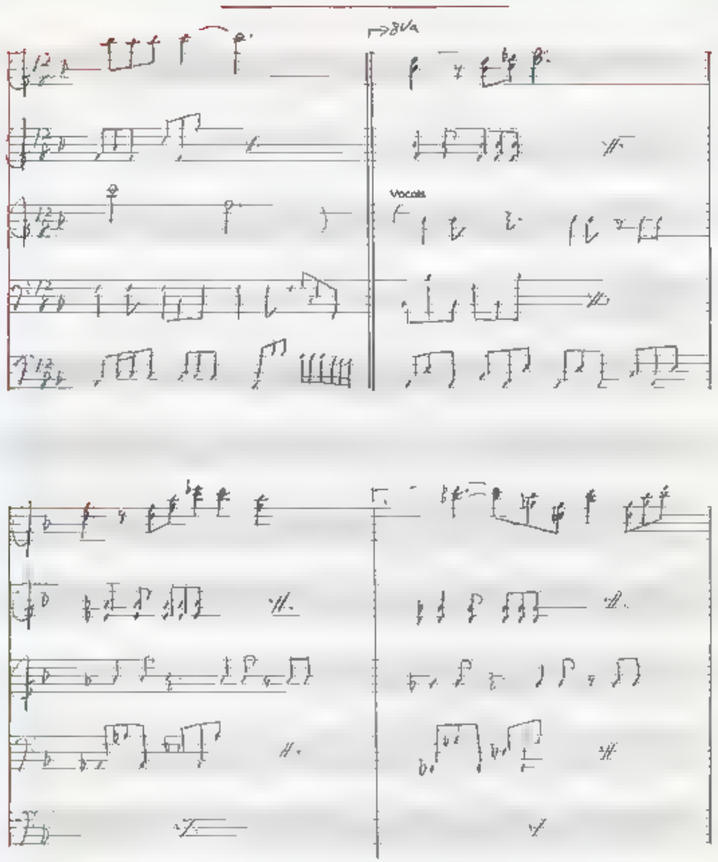
● Burning Heat

24



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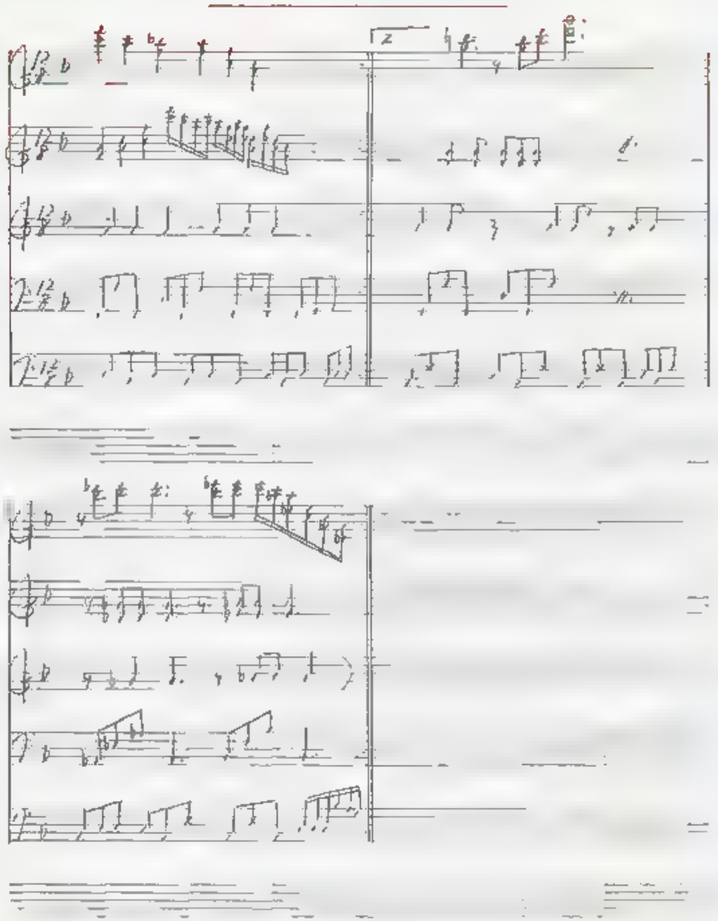
● Burning Heat

25



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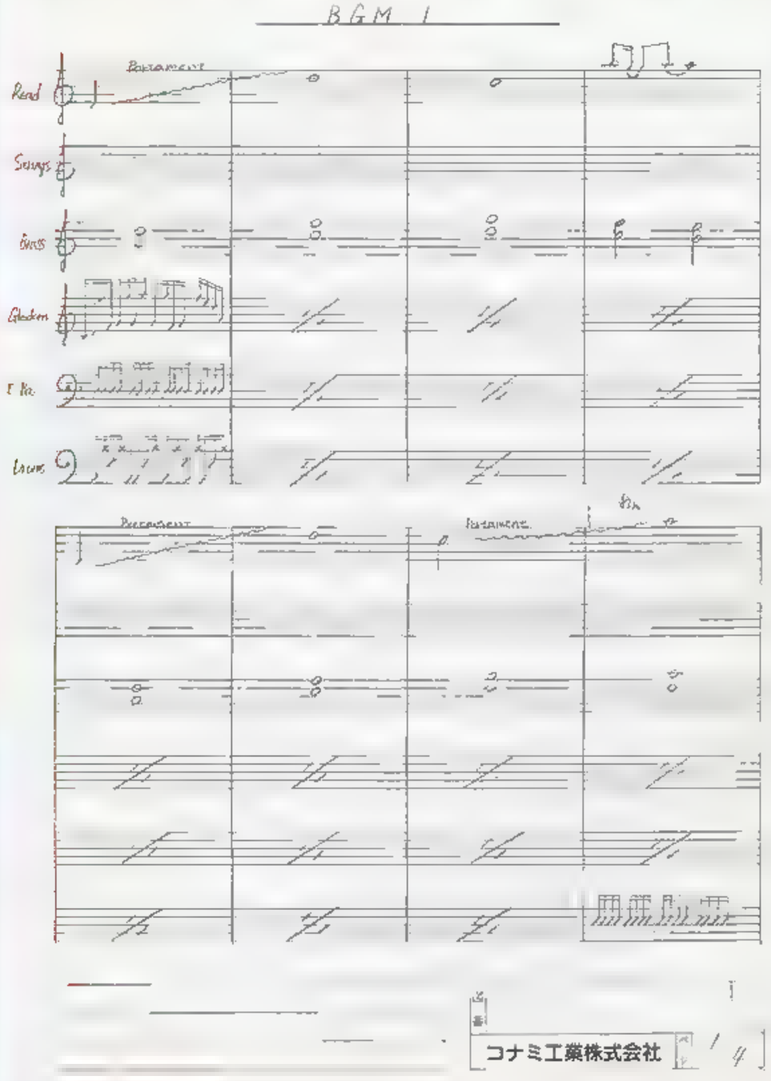
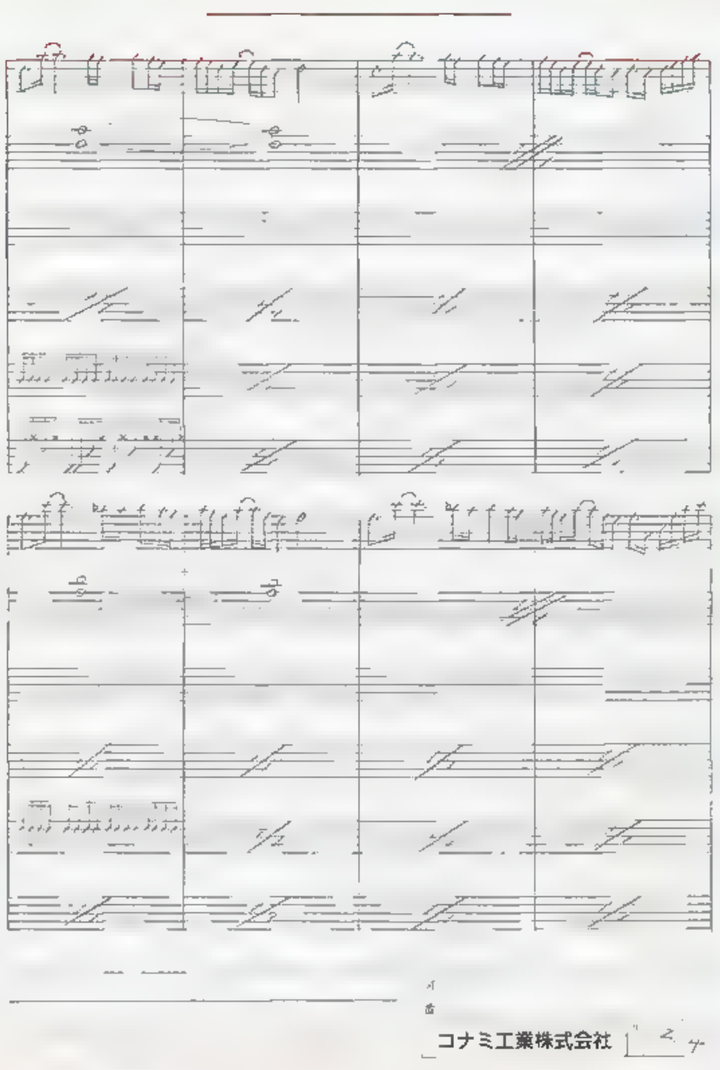
● Burning Heat

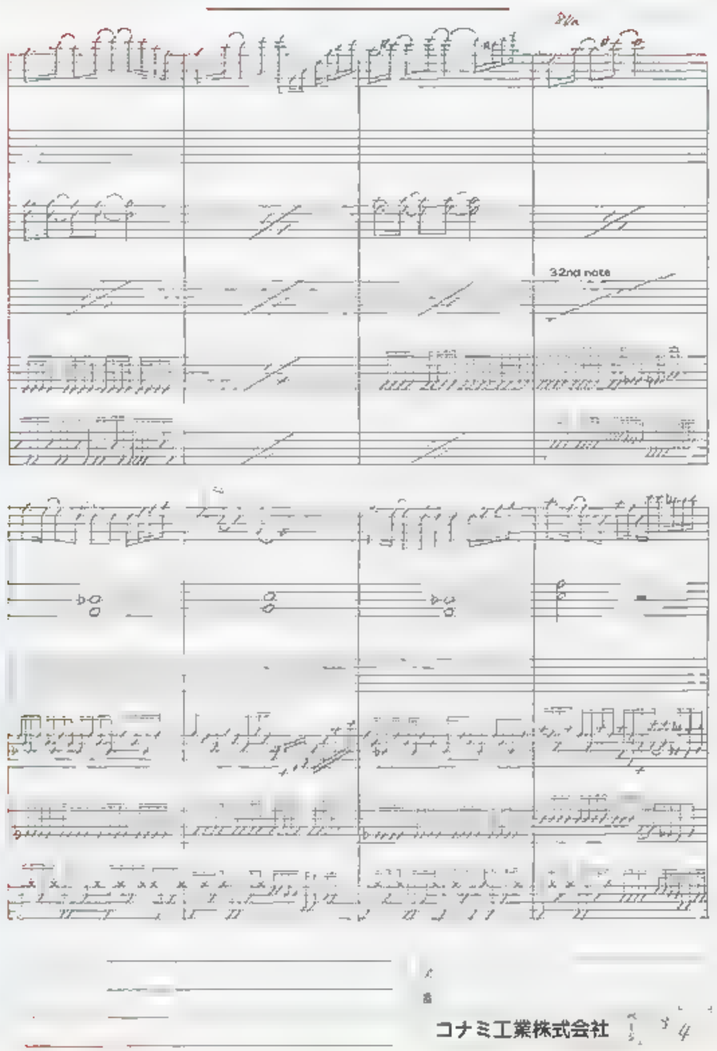
Thunder Cross Score



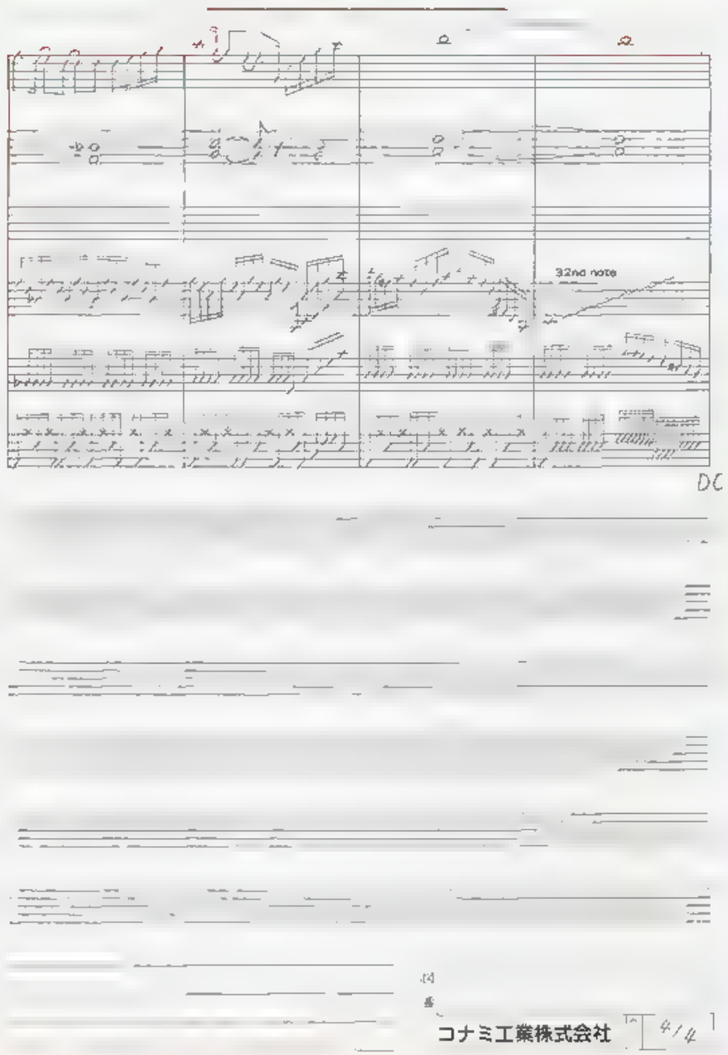
● First Attack



● First Attack



● First Attack

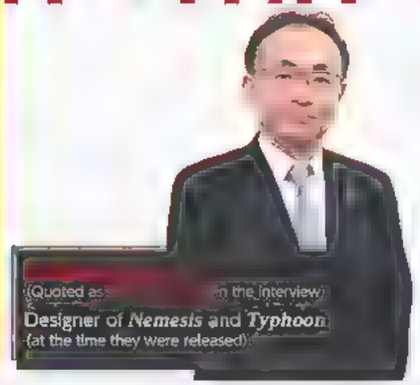


● First Attack

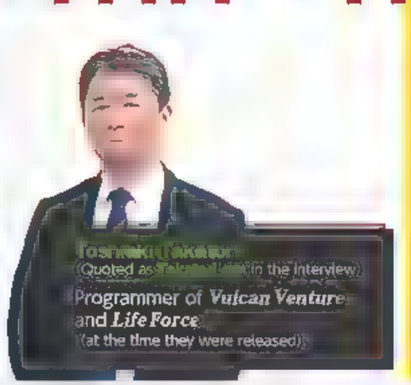
Kengo Nakamori
Chapter 3
Developer Interviews
Toshiaki Takaoka

Developer Interview

Kengo Nakamura × Toshiaki Takatori



(Quoted as [illegible] in the interview)
Designer of *Nemesis* and *Typhoon*
(at the time they were released)



Toshiaki Takatori
(Quoted as [illegible] in the interview)
Programmer of *Vulcan Venture* and *Life Force*
(at the time they were released)

Early Beginnings of Making Circuit Boards and Tools for New Methods of Visual Expression

For starters, what was it like on a development team back when the two of you were making arcade games like *Nemesis*?

Nakamura-san: Partly because the company wasn't as large as it is now, it really felt as if my coworkers and I were family. I joined KONAMI when the company started hiring designers, I remember one of the first things I noticed being that I had a lot of freedom. I could wear whatever I wanted, and it was really easygoing, with all of us going out for food when it got late.

Takatori-san: Back then what would be called a design team was actually quite compact, with only three programmers and three designers or so making up what would be a standard team. The sound staff would be in charge of multiple titles at once.

Arcade development started with making the circuit boards and microchips, with the chips being made once we began talking about what sort of visuals we wanted to present next. We'd then mount these chips on a board and combine our talents to achieve a type of presentation other companies couldn't match in those days.

Starting with the circuit boards must have been difficult.

Takatori-san: We did have a base board to work from, which in the case of *Nemesis* that Nakamura-san worked on was the GX400 board. It was equipped with **bubble memory***, but used a common motherboard. The GX400 could run different games by switching out the cartridge on top of it. So, in a way it was kind of like a NES, but for business purposes. The only thing was that bubble memory happened to be extremely delicate.

Bubble memory needed to be warmed when starting up, correct?

Takatori-san: That's right. The famous *Konami Morning Music* would play during the countdown as the circuits of the cartridge warmed up and the data was loaded. In the winter, there would be times where the board had a hard time starting, and the countdown would start over from 99 because the loading wasn't complete, even when it reached 0 [laughs]. The GX400 was a sensitive yet interesting circuit board.

Nakamura-san: It was also an enormous source of grief for us developers [laughs].

What was the development time for games like in those days?

Nakamura-san: There were these cheap, limited-capacity circuit boards called "low cost circuit boards," and if things went quickly with one of them we could make a game in three months or so. Making *Nemesis* involved a lot scrapping and starting over, so I believe it took about eight months. Thinking back on it, though, the flipside was perhaps that it was a game that allowed us to tackle new challenges in terms of hardware, software, graphics, and sound. But, I was the new kid on the block at the time, so it was all I could do to knock out the work I had in front of me [laughs].

It's surprising to hear that *Nemesis* only took eight months to make given how influential it proved to be on shoot 'em ups that followed.

Takatori-san: That's because the working environment back then was different.

Nakamura-san: Back when KONAMI was located in Toyonaka City, Osaka, we all lived nearby the offices so that we could come by anytime. Then when the company relocated to Port Island, they even set up facilities in the office so that we could sleep there if we had to.

*bubble memory: A type of memory storage that utilizes magnetism, at that time it was also used as a form of removable media. Starting with the circuit board on *Nemesis*, bubble memory was used in arcade games. This was known as the Bubble System.

Did you have much connection or involvement with other teams?

Nakamura-san: We used to have this big computer room where the other teams were just a glance away. They would often let me try out their games and asked what I thought.

What was the production environment like? It's easy to imagine that most computers at that time weren't set up to work with sprites.

Nakamura-san: We started off developing with tools that were already out there. KONAMI then later made their own original graphics tools. It was the same with sound, where they also put together their own software in-house. The circumstances were such back then that you couldn't really make anything new if you didn't take those steps.

Unlike Today, Development Teams Were Small

You stated that production in those days began with programming and other system building, but what was the overall workflow like when making a game?

Takaori-san: There would be a director in charge of the team who would dole out the work, but games would change a lot as we went along. If a game seemed interesting in the beginning but started to feel stale as time went on we would hold project meetings where all of the team members took part in the planning and jointly contributed opinions.

Nakamura-san: Having their own thoughts reflected in the finished product helped motivate the team.

Takatori-san: Yeah, since even a newcomer's idea would be used if it proved interesting.

Nakamura-san: In those days, there was a "those who do, win" mentality. We couldn't tell if an idea would be fun or not when it was put into the game. So say for instance the designers and programmers get together to try and make something. After a little brushing up you could start to see the shape the game would take. It's funny how everything seemed to come together in the crunch period right before the location tests [laughs]. Even though it wasn't so long ago that none of us knew what we were going to end up with, a week or so goes by and suddenly it all comes together to resemble a game. It was an impressive thing to see.

Behind the Scenes Stories of the Classic Game, *Nemesis*

How did production of *Nemesis* begin?

Nakamura-san: The idea was to make a game that followed in the footsteps of *Scramble*. They actually already had a sort of rough draft of the game done when I came on as a new hire. But, the team consisted of two programmers... So, they brought in me and two other women in as designers. Our initial orders were to "make the game look more fun." The first designs were nothing but print type and scribblings, so our task was to build on those images and make a rough draft. So, *Nemesis* came about only because of *Scramble*. I wasn't familiar with *Scramble*, though, so when I played it for the first time at work I was like "Man, what's with this difficult game!" [laughs].

It's amazing to see what *Nemesis* became after you came on board in those circumstances.

Nakamura-san: So much of my work got rejected that I was crying bloody tears by the time the game was completed. The scope of the art I'm capable of making is pretty limited, right? I was always better at drawing living things, so all I drew were these creature-like characters. Even Vic Viper started off with a somewhat organic feel and not that cool design it eventually had. I was terrible at designing mechanical stuff back then, so I had one of my coworkers who was good in that area coach me as I worked. I spent six of the eight months we were developing *Nemesis* practicing mech design. I started off by copying the character sheets they have in the back of anime magazines [laughs]. In other words, it only took a month to complete the final design.

—— The long lasers and Options in *Nemesis* must have been new features at the time. Were they difficult to make?

Nakamura-san: The lasers were particularly troublesome.

Takatori-san: Basically, the number of objects that could be displayed at once was limited, so shooting out a long laser meant that art would suddenly disappear. Those lasers were in fact made by placing them on top of the background and not by arranging them as objects.

—— So you used those kinds of tricks in the arcade version, too.

Takatori-san: The long lasers taxed the capabilities of the circuit boards we had at the time.

Nakamura-san: Those lasers were the work of our team leader at the time, who was extremely particular... The lasers we had in mind were the short ones from the NES version of *Nemesis**, right? (**Nemesis* was released on the NES under the title *Gradius*.) There was a proposal to have short lasers during the initial stages, but the team leader said "Those aren't lasers," so we repeatedly made new ones and scrapped them. So, those long lasers exist solely because of that guy's fixation.

—— An essential element of *Nemesis* is the "slowdown," where movement speed drops when there are a lot of projectiles on screen. Was that something that was put in on purpose?

Takatori-san: That wasn't something we added intentionally. As the people making the game, we wanted the action to be smooth, if possible. But, the CPU we had at the time, the Motorola MC68000, had limited processing capacity, so it would run more slowly when there were a lot of characters on screen. Things will speed up all of a sudden as the player defeats enemies and reduces their numbers, so the projectiles will also go faster and miss [laughs].

—— Was there any awareness at the time that things slowing down a bit could in fact be a new gameplay element? Like the way it allowed players to get their way out of sticky situations by avoiding tons of shots coming at them because the projectiles were moving slowly. I think that made people feel like they were really good at the game.

Nakamura-san: It really did turn out well.

Memorable Arcade Titles and the Difficulties of Bygone Days

—— This is for both of you, but out of all the games you've worked on, which were the most memorable?

Nakamura-san: *Nemesis*, the first game I made. What gave me the most trouble were the Options. My first idea for the design for the player's ship was an animal, like a seahorse or sunfish. Thinking the Options would be like the ship's young, I made them to look like little sunfish. However, when the design switched from an animal to a fighter ship, I knew it would look weird to have a bunch of small Vic Vipers. The design needed to be one that wouldn't cause problems when overlapped with the background scenery as well. I eventually settled upon masses of energy, but I really had to rack my brain to arrive at that idea. Another game was *Monster Maulers*, for which I took the helm as director. Around that time I felt like the PVP fighting game genre was getting a bit stale. That's why I went with the idea of having players fight huge monsters in this game. *Monster Maulers* received good reactions during location tests, but 3D fighting games happened to come out around the same time and just blew it out of the water. They may have made off with all of the revenue, but I was happy that we had a great theme song and that some fans out there enjoyed the game [laughs]. We were able to put in our own characters and pretty much do whatever we wanted, so this game turned into a very memorable experience for me.

—— How about you, Takatori-san?

Takatori-san: I'd have to go with *Life Force*. It was the first title I worked on upon joining Konami, and just really sticks out in my mind because of all the new experimentation that went into making it. That and the fact that it featured a lot of ideas I came up with. For example, having different equipment for the first and second player, or doing vertical and horizontal scrolling in a single game. We tried all sorts of new things, and as a result brought in tons of money during the location tests, with the coin boxes positively overflowing. I also have a lot of love for *Vulcan Venture*, which people still send me comments

about their experience playing. I'm thrilled that people still remember this game from over 30 years ago, and that their children might have the chance to play it too as part of *Arcade Classics*. Nothing would make me happier than for parents and children to experience the game together.

—— I personally remember being shocked when I first played *Life Force* because of how different it was from *Nemesis* with all the grotesque enemies and cells that grew larger when they were shot. Was the development environment different at that time as well?

Takatori-san: *Life Force* was made with a circuit board that didn't use the Bubble System (see explanation of bubble memory on page 92), so part of it was that we had better performance. I don't think any other developer back then could have made fire appear the way it did in our game.

—— Both of you have been involved with so many arcade games. Can you share some particularly difficult episodes from your game production days?

Nakamura-san: It was nothing but hardship. Although, in those days I didn't really consider it as such.

Takatori-san: It definitely was an endless succession of struggles. It's all about 3D computer graphics now, but there are also dedicated production libraries available for that, right? It was tough for us because we had to start by making a new development environment each time, with the dev tools first and then followed by tools that would allow the designers to check characters and build stages.

—— So you were making the game and development environment at the same time.

Takatori-san: That's right. And if the environment wasn't made well, it could also impact the development of the game. We never knew if something was going to be interesting or not until we actually tried it, so we had to come up with different kinds of tools that would enable us to test ideas easily.

Nakamura-san: This is something unique to the old days, but a designer's work back then wasn't just drawing designs and pushing pixels. We also had to delete unnecessary ROM data and check for bugs. What's more, even though I was weak at math and thus better at doing art, I still had to compile data.

—— So everyone on the team really did have to go beyond their job description and do whatever was needed.

Nakamura-san: Even in those days there wasn't really anyone that only worked on a single task. That's how it was at KONAMI; there weren't many boundaries overall, with the way everyone took part in planning being an example.

—— Let's wrap things up with a message for those who will be playing *Arcade Classics*.

Takatori-san: These games are from 30 years or more ago so I'm sure they may be lacking in some regards, but I hope that those who were gamer kids back in those days will enjoy a trip down memory lane as they play them. Also, I hope that the children whose parents played these games when they came out will now play them too.

Nakamura-san: It'd be nice if people get even a little taste of the unique characteristics older games have to offer. The style of presentation with the graphics and music are different compared to today's games, but I don't think titles from yesteryear come up short in memorability. So, I think people may have an even deeper appreciation for these games if they look over these interviews and materials, and then picture what things were like when the games were made.

03 Developer Interviews

Bonus Round Table Discussion

What if there was an Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection 2?

Three people involved in the production of this bonus book imagine what a sequel would be like. Their imaginations run wild as they passionately discuss their favorite titles that didn't make the cut this time.

Participants:

Dedeo
(*Weekly Famitsu* editor)

An editor who loves arcade games. Has a weakness for games with cute characters.

missiLE Ono
(*Weekly Famitsu* editor)

An editor who loves classic games. He's particularly fond of 1980s shooting games.

Arata Hanzomon
(writer)

Freelance writer and KONAMI game fan. Knows a lot about games, but apparently not that great at playing them.

What games do the editors and writer want in the next collection?

Arata Hanzomon (quoted below as "A"): The one that first comes to mind is *Time Pilot* (1982). It's not only fun, but the cut scenes when you finish a stage are so cool!

Dedeo (quoted below as "D"): I used to play *Time Pilot* at an old mom-and-pop store. When the Weekly Famitsu magazine asked me for my "32nd favorite game," I told them, *Time Pilot*. Of course the sequel, *Time Pilot '84* (1984) is also worth mentioning. It was at my local arcade only for a brief time, so I'd love to play it again.

A: What's so great about *Time Pilot*?

D: It felt really amazing to just spray bullets and fly around. It looked like you were shooting way more than you actually were, probably because of the visual effects, and that kind of made you feel real badass. *Road Fighter* (1984) was also popular back then. Racing games in those days usually had a bird's eye view, with cars coming into view from the top of the screen. *Road Fighter* was particularly colorful compared to the other racing games.

missiLE Ono (quoted below as "O"): In a lot of other titles, your car would explode if you hit an obstacle, but *Road Fighter* was different. You could steer in the opposite direction to keep your balance if you got hit, and stay on the track. I also have fond memories of *Crime Fighters* (1989). It was a beat 'em up that I liked a lot, so it'd be awesome if it was included.

D: I'd like to play *Sunset Riders* (1991), too. It wasn't ported to a console for home use, but I enjoyed it.

O: Actually, I think it was released overseas on console.

D: Oh really? It was basically a side-scrolling action game, but a lot of thought and effort had been put into the animation, and it was just a lot of fun. I think it'd make for a fun "Let's Play" to watch.

There are so many classics from the '90s, so it's hard to choose...

A: Alright then, let's talk '90s titles. I'd like it if shooting games outside of the *Gradius* series, like *Lightning Fighters* (1990) were included. After all, there aren't a lot of places where you can play those these days.

D: When I play *Lightning Fighters* now I find that the hitbox is big, which makes it difficult.

O: Many shooters in recent years have small hitboxes, so a game like this would feel more challenging, but worthwhile.

D: It would be nice if shooters that are rare or were never ported could be put in a collection. Rare stuff like *Thunder Cross II* (1991) or *Salamander 2* (1996).

A: In my case, I would be happy to see *Fantastic Journey* (1994).

D: The *Parodius* series should definitely be in there. What about *Monster Maulers* (1993)?

O: That game had a theme song with lyrics, which I still remember playing at my arcade.

Bonus Round Table Discussion What if there was an Arcade Classics Anniversary Collection 2?

D: I was like, "What the hell?!" I also used to play *Dragoon Might* (1995). There used to be an arcade called Chuo Plaza in Shibuya, and they had head-to-head cabinets for every title, so the competition was intense. I liked using Zack, the character with the big sword.

O: Do you remember *Gaiapolis* (1993)? It was a vertically scrolling action RPG in which you collected XP to level up, it would be nice to be able to play it on a console and take your time. I kept feeding more coins into the machine to keep leveling up, but in the end I forgot my password and was devestated [laughs].

A: Personally I'd want to see *Orius* (Europe: *Xexex*) (1991).

D: Yeah, I want to play that too.

O: The animations in the demo scene were really cool.

D: When you cleared a stage, and Princess Irene, voiced by Sumi Shimamoto, would desperately cry out for help...

A: I always felt like I had seen something I wasn't supposed to [laughs].

D: What's unfair is that you could skip the scene with a button. I was pretending that I just wanted to play a shooter, but really, I wanted to watch those scenes. Because everyone knew you could skip it, I felt like I had to in order to look cool. Now that I'm an adult, I could watch it without skipping it [laughs].

A: I'd also be happy if we could use this opportunity to bring back that racing game, *Vic Viper*. It was a shame that it was cancelled during development.

D: Huh? I don't exactly remember where, but I could have sworn I played that. When you were about to lose, the game would cheer you up, saying "It's alright, you got this," or something.

A: I'd be happy even just to see some footage of it... Wow, we could talk about this stuff forever!

D: I'll conclude by saying that I want every KONAMI game to be included!

O: That's probably a bit much to ask [laughs].

D: Okay then, we have no choice. Let's also fantasize about the contents of the third collection!

All: Agreed.

ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

ARCADE CLASSICS

The History of KONAMI Arcade Classics

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